Youth-led Interfaith Dialogue in Building Positive Peace

Case study of Together for Finland

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Abstract

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Abstract: This thesis explores the connection between interfaith dialogue and building positive peace through the case study of Together for Finland (TFF), a youth-led interfaith dialogue program. It does so through the main research question 'How does TFF understand and utilize interfaith dialogue and to what end?' In this way the thesis also seeks to contribute to the understanding of how and why youth in particular engage in interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. Arising from the data of the study, the thesis also examines the role of non-religious participants in interfaith dialogue.

To achieve these goals, this thesis builds on two main theoretical foundations. The first is a wider understanding of peace and peacebuilding reliant on Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace. The relation of this to religious peacebuilding and peace education is also explored to better understand how it connects to the work of TFF. The second relies on the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner to examine the role of identities and intergroup relations in TFF's work. In connection, concepts and models of interfaith and intergroup dialogue are explored to reflect on how TFF's format of interfaith dialogue relates to existing theoretical models of dialogue. The particularities present in TFF's work, mainly that the participants are youth and some identify as non-religious, are examined in relation to previous research on the topic.

The main data set for this thesis is interpersonal semi-structured interviews with six active members of TFF, whose selection is based on purposeful sampling. A secondary data set is an exhibition TFF held on the topic of their work. The study takes a constructionist and qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the interviewees, and through them TFF, construct their understanding of the concepts of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding along with their work. The data is analysed using qualitative content analysis as a method.

The study found that active members of TFF construct their understanding of their work through four main categories. Firstly, majority of their work relies on a storytelling method based on personal narratives. Secondly, identities feature prominently in their work through a focus on facilitating identity exploration and breaking prejudices and TFF has found a way to successfully include non-religious participants and values their participation. Thirdly, the main focus of their dialogue format is to bring people together to learn from each other and to improve intergroup relationships. And fourthly, they seek to build peace through increasing awareness of inequalities and subsequent motivation to engage in social justice work. Through all of this youth are viewed as key actors, both in engaging in dialogue and in creating change, and the youth perspective shapes their work.

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1. Introduction

The question of interaction of people from different cultures and religions is one that has long been relevant but that has gained further recognition in this time of globalisation. It is argued that dialogue between different people is vital to a peaceful coexistence and understanding which has led to a rise in research regarding different forms of dialogue as well as different programs implementing dialogue between people. One such form of dialogue that has risen in popularity, in part as a response to religious justification for violence in cases such as 9/11, is interfaith dialogue. What began as a high-level dialogue between and led by religious leaders has since expanded to include more grass-roots level dialogue between different communities.

Another important shift that has occurred is the increasing awareness of the need to practice conflict prevention and to increase social cohesion also in societies that are not suffering from a violent conflict. The perspective has shifted from viewing conflict as something that only exists when direct (armed) violence is present and ends when peace is negotiated to an understanding that peace is a much more multifaceted state that requires active engagement to uphold. Such thinking, along with unfortunate triggers such as events of domestic terrorism, has led to a new focus on measures of internal security and an increased awareness of the need to address possible divisions and underlying conflict in societies.

This study seeks to bring together these discourses and to illustrate how interfaith dialogue as a method can relate to the building of social cohesion and peace in societies. However, what both of these discourses are often missing, and what this study for its part seeks to address, is the lack of acknowledgment of the particular role the youth play. It may be cliché to say that the youth are the future, but it must be acknowledged that the youth are a key target demographic for implementing lasting change. But even more importantly youth are already actively involved in these issues, as is evident in the case study this thesis is based on, a youth-led interfaith dialogue program Together for Finland.

1.1. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250: Youth, Peace and Security

One of the main inspirations for why this topic was chosen, was this low levels of attention youth involvement has typically received in both peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue. However, in December 2015 the United Nations Security Council adopted a ground-breaking resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security.[1] It was the first of its kind, not only recognize

[1] It and it's core message has since also been reaffirmed by resolutions 2419 and 2535.

that the youth are one of the most adversely affected parts of the population in conflicts, but also to highlight the importance and positive contributions of the youth in maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Thus, it also calls for both recognition of the work youth are doing for peacebuilding and the inclusion of youth in peace processes in general. It notes that the involvement of the youth is a 'key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.'[2]

The resolution was significant as it shifted the narrative on the role of youth in conflict situations away from seeing them as only perpetrators or victims and recognized their role as active participants in peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. It also in its five pillars - participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration – in many places displays a wider understanding of peacebuilding as something to be implemented in all societies in general even outside of actual conflict situations.[3] Thus, it is also relevant in countries like Finland, which has just finished its own National Action Plan based on the resolution 2250 that will guide Finland's implementation of the commitments laid out in the resolution.

1.2. Interfaith Dialogue in Finland

It is important for this study to account for the context in which it takes place. The Finnish context is quite unique for interfaith dialogue due to high levels of religious homogeneity. About 70 per cent of Finns belong to the evangelical Lutheran church,[4] and the majority of the youth, for instance, still attend confirmation training around the age of 15. However, the percentage of people who consider themselves actively religious is rather low especially in the younger generations, and secularity and separation of church and state have become widely supported ideals in the society.[5] All of this seems to create a rather low level of awareness of issues related to interfaith dialogue.

However, Finland has long had significant denominational and religious minorities, with the Orthodox church as the biggest with a little over 1 per cent of Finns.[6] Likely as a result, the ecumenical interactions between different Christian denominations, led by the Finnish Ecumenical Council, have flourished for quite a while already.[7] But it is also

[2] United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 2250.'
[3] Ibid.
[4] InfoFinland, 'Cultures and Religions in Finland.'
[5] See for example 'Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa. Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko 2016–2019' by the Evangelical Lutheran church in Finland.
[6] InfoFinland, 'Cultures and Religions in Finland.'
[7] Finnish Ecumenical Council, 'Finnish Ecumenical Council.'

important to note the traditional religious minorities in Finland, such as Tatar Muslims, and the more recent increasing diversity in the religious landscape resulting from migration. And thus, more recently interfaith interactions have also become more prevalent with the founding of The National Forum for the Cooperation of Religions in Finland (CORE Forum) 10 years ago. The CORE Forum describes its mission as 'fostering social peace and religious freedom by promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual respect,' and was founded as a response to the events of 9/11.[8]

1.2.2. Together for Finland

However, as my focus from the start was on the role of youth in interfaith dialogue, I looked for youth-led interfaith dialogue initiatives for a case study to base my thesis on. As with interfaith dialogue in general, there weren't that many of them to begin with, and I was only able to identify two projects aimed at and facilitated by youth: Interfaith café by Suomen Kristillinen Ylioppilasliitto and Together for Finland by Ad Astra. The latter was chosen due to considerations rising from the covid-19 pandemic and restrictions it posed on the study. In the following, this project will be introduced in detail.

Together for Finland -program is facilitated by Ad Astra, an intercultural education and dialogue organization. Together for Finland was founded in 2015 in collaboration with and inspired by Tilsammans för Sverige, a similar program in Sweden hosted by Fryshuset I Stockholm. The Faith Forum in London is also listed as a significant source of inspiration.[9] On their website the Together for Finland Program has been described as follows:

> Our TFF-program concerns peace-education, interfaith dialogue and story-telling. Young persons aged 15-30 with various religious/cultural backgrounds get trained in dialogue and personal story telling. TFF aims at interfaith guidance and education and we stand up against xenophobia, racism and extremism. We base our work on human rights and we show that religion can be a way into integration and empowering strength for young people towards peace and mutual understanding. TFF also provides young interfaith story-tellers to schools.[10]

They go on to further describe several parts of TFF's mission such as it being a common platform, where young people from different backgrounds can come together and a place for them to be supported in deepening their faith and to use it as a growing power in the work for peace and understanding. In addition, they see their mission as creating a deeper understanding of "the other" and eliminating misconceptions and prejudices between people

[8] National Forum for the Cooperation of Religions in Finland, 'About us.'
[9] Exhibition, image 1 (appendices).
[10] Ad Astra, 'Together for Finland.'

in society. Initiating cooperation with various organizations and communities around issues of diversity, democracy and coexistence is also viewed to be an important part of their work.[11]

1.3. Research Questions and Structure

As referenced earlier, this thesis will explore the connections between interfaith dialogue and a wider understanding of peace and peacebuilding. It will do so focusing on the youth perspective and youth-led work by examining the specific example of a youth-led interfaith initiative: the Together for Finland program by Ad Astra. A comprehensive understanding of how they view these themes and construct their work and is the desired outcome of this study. To that end, the main research question in this study is *How does TFF understand and utilize interfaith dialogue and to what end?* While answering this question, special attention will be paid to how this is impacted by the fact that TFF is a youth-led project that also targets the youth. In addition to these questions, and arising in part from the data, the connection of interfaith dialogue and social identities is explored along with the question of the participation of youth who identify as non-religious in interfaith dialogue.

In this way, this study seeks to address the aforementioned gap in research relating to youth participation in both peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue. As the program under study is youth-led, this also affords an important look into how youth in particular understand these topics and engage with them and their motivation to do so.

Having been a part of the consultation process for Finland's National Action Plan on the UNSCR2250, and since I personally work a lot with the Youth, Peace and Security thematic outside my studies, it was perhaps natural that it impacted my choice of thesis topic as well. While the resolution is gaining momentum on the international governmental and organizational levels, there isn't yet much research on youth as active peacebuilders. Even though this study does not aim to make any kind of generalizable inquiry into work of young peacebuilders, it does for its part focus on a specific group of them and their work and perceptions. In this way, I hope this work will in a small part contribute to a rise in the recognition of the important work youth are doing to advance peace in our societies.

In addition, the master's program track under which this thesis was written focuses on religion, conflict and dialogue, which has naturally also guided the choice of the topic of the study to focus on the contribution of interfaith dialogue in peacebuilding. And the fact that the master's program is by nature interdisciplinary is also reflected in the interdisciplinary nature

[11] Ad Astra, 'Together for Finland.'

of this study, which combines theoretical frameworks from theology and study of religions, social psychology and peace research as can be observed in chapter 2.

To explore the research questions, a constructionist approach, which will be examined in chapter 3, was chosen in order to understand how the youth in this particular program construct both their understanding of the relevant themes, and their work in general. As this is a case study of a specific program and their opinion, experience and work, a qualitative methodology was chosen. To answer the research question, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with six active members of the TFF program. The interviews focused both on the work TFF does but also the participants own views on topics of interfaith dialogue and peace. This material was then analysed by employing qualitative content analysis as a method.

This thesis is structured in a way where this introduction is followed by an exploration of the theoretical background and previous research, where the key theories used are explained and the key concepts defined. This is followed by a deeper look into the data collection process, the data itself and the methodology used to analyse said data. The next, and of course the most important part, is the analysis chapter, where the actual data analysis is detailed and answers to the research question are explored. And finally, the thesis ends with the final conclusions followed by the bibliography and appendices.

2. Theoretical Background and Previous Research

This thesis is reliant on two theoretical foundations. Firstly, to study contributions of the program in the context of Finland, where there is no ongoing armed conflict, it is necessary to take a wider look at how peace can be understood. This is achieved through Johan Galtung's theory on the existence of both negative and positive peace. After this theoretical foundation is laid, it is necessary to understand the potential of interfaith dialogue initiatives like TFF to contribute to building peace. This is achieved by taking a look at wider concepts such as religious peacebuilding and peace education.

The second theoretical foundation is needed in order to study the mechanisms through which TFF works to achieve its goal, which is done through the Social Identity Theory, a foundational theory in social psychology exploring the dynamics of intergroup relationships. This creates the framework that is used to study the activities the TFF engages in and their connection to wider practices like interfaith and intergroup dialogue, which are the last relevant concepts that need to be explored. As a self-proclaimed interfaith dialogue program, it is of course relevant to study TFF in the context of wider research on interfaith dialogue, although in this thesis the connections of interfaith dialogue to intergroup dialogue in general are also explored. Lastly, the complexities related to different types of participants in interfaith dialogue are explored, providing insight to particularities raised in this study.

2.1. Peace and Peacebuilding

For this study to talk about peacebuilding[12] in context where no violent conflict is taking place, such as Finland, it is important to take a wider perspective into what peace means. One of the most influential theories on the nature of peace comes from Johan Galtung, whose understanding of both peace and violence is multifaceted. For example, he categorises three different types of violence*: direct violence* referring to intent to cause harm, *structural violence* meaning the largely non-intended harm caused by, for example, economic and political systems and *cultural violence* that legitimizes the previous forms of violence.[13]

However, Galtung also has a two-fold understanding of the nature of peace. His definition of *negative peace* is close to our traditional understanding of peace as it refers to the absence of all the forms of violence mentioned above, but Galtung also speaks of *positive*

[12] The term peacebuilding in this thesis is understood in a broad sense as encompassing both peace mediation activities during conflict as well as peacebuilding and -maintenance activities outside of one.
[13] Galtung and Fischer, *Pioneer of Peace Research*, 173-174.

peace which goes beyond the passive coexistence of different groups of people inferred by the presence of negative peace and requires 'active good work towards love and harmony'.[14]

The nexus of these different forms of violence and peace can be complicated, but the following examples illustrate the different levels that exist. Negative peace in the case of direct violence would be the implementation of a ceasefire, whereas positive peace would be an extension of that to the presence of co-operation. On structural violence, negative peace would equal the absence of exploitation and positive peace the presence of equity and equality. And lastly, when it comes to cultural violence, negative peace would refer to the absence of justification for violence and positive peace, on the other hand would require a presence of a culture of peace and dialogue.[15]

As can be seen from this, positive peace extends far beyond our traditional understanding of peace and has a very wide scope. In fact, Fischer describes the range of possible activities related to positive peace extending from 'building a life-sustaining economy at the local, national and global level in which everyone's basic needs are met' to 'good governance and participation, self-determination, human rights.'[16] Nonetheless, it is obvious, as Atalia Omer argues, that peacebuilding is 'intricately associated' with positive peace and related question of justice as well as concern over structural and cultural violence.[17]

2.1.1. Religious Peacebuilding

To understand how interfaith dialogue initiatives such as TFF are related to these concepts of negative and positive peace and how they contribute to peacebuilding, we must first look at how religion itself relates to peace. In his book *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, which is often considered a seminal work in the field of religious peacebuilding, Scott Appleby places the focus not only on the capacity of religion to provoke conflicts but also on its potential to consistently contribute to peaceful conflict resolution. He goes so far as to argue that a new form of what he terms 'religious peacebuilding' has been taking shape at the grassroots level in communities suffering from violent conflict.[18]

Later in his career he joins David Little, another prominent author in the field, in further defining the term religious peacebuilding as 'the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict,

[14] Galtung and Fischer, *Pioneer of Peace Research*, 173-174.
[15] Ibid., 174.
[16] Fischer in Bernard Amadei, 'Revisiting Positive Peace Using Systems Tools,' 2.
[17] Atalia Omer. 'Religious Peacebuilding,' 10.
[18] Appleby, R. Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 4.

with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence.'[19] In this definition we can distinguish three main conditions: the actor are defined as religious, the aim is to have a positive impact on the conflict and lastly, there is a wider aim of transforming society in line with the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence – the last condition of which can be observed to closely resemble the aims of positive peace.

Marc Gopin, another prominent author in the field, on the other hand looks more at the theological aspects of religions and their relation to peace. This includes, for example, people's values and their effect on individuals and societies as well as internal religious processes and convictions.[20] He also focuses more on the concrete ways in which religion can contribute to peace processes, for example through joint religious rituals. He also studies how religion affects, for example, emotional training, interpersonal relations and encounters as well as respect.[21] Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson for their part go further and argue that religion-based programs are more effective than social or political ones in reaching individuals and leaders and achieving commitment to peace. For example, they encourage emphasizing religious values as a part of educational programs or intergroup encounters, as a way of enhancing positive relations between individuals and groups in conflict.[22]

What we can see from this is that religions and religiosity have the capacity to contribute to peacebuilding and that this capacity is a relevant resource outside of the context of armed conflict as well. In its self-description TFF too views religion as an important resource for both individual empowerment and peacebuilding. The concepts of negative and positive peace along with the different categorisations of violence illustrate areas where peacebuilding can be utilized further. One method for putting this into practice is that of peace education, which will be explored next.

2.1.2. Peace Education

As a concrete method of peacebuilding and part of the self-determination of TFF, the concept of peace education is also an important one for this study. Alan Smith notes that there exists a close link between education, social cohesion and conflict which denotes how education can either promote the management of diversity within societies without recourse to violence or

[19] Little and Appelby, 'A Moment of Opportunity,' 6.
[20] Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 13-14.
[21] Omer, 'Religious Peacebuilding,' 4.
[22] Yablon, 'Religion as a Basis for Dialogue,' 343.

be an instrument by which divisions are exacerbated.[23] The actual roots of peace education can be seen in the Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989): 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.'[24] This, of course closely echoes the goals of religious peacebuilding as well as those of positive peace.

Peace education itself can be, for example, defined as 'educational strategies aimed at transforming societal divisions and conflict into peaceful and sustainable relationships.'[25] Furthermore, UNICEF identifies three distinct areas of education in peacebuilding: education in emergencies, conflict sensitive education that does not reinforce existing intergroup divisions and inequalities and education that actively supports peacebuilding through political, economic and social reforms as well as change in attitudes, values and norms. [27] Again, especially the final part closely relates to the concept of positive peace.

As for the form and content of peace education, Scherto Gill and Ulrike Niens present four different pedagogical strategies: firstly, there is *citizenship education*, which aims to cultivate active citizenship, democratic skills and inclusive values. Secondly, *values education* is rooted in moral and religious education and aims to promote what are seen as universal values and virtues necessary for building peaceful societies and is perhaps most closely linked to most common forms of religious peacebuilding. Thirdly, *history education* addresses divergent notions of history and their impact on identities and communities.[28] And lastly, *critical education* seeks to understand the roots of violence (e.g. direct, cultural, structural etc) and develop critical thinking and action around peace and justice issues.[29] As a form of reflection, dialogue and collaborative inquiry are foundational in critical peace education,[30] it most closely aligns with theories and approaches this study utilizes, which will be discussed later, as well as the actual work TFF does. Furthermore, while all strategies have a definite value in building peace, critical peace education best addresses the aspect of building positive peace in particular.

So far, it has become evident that the concept and aims of positive peace can also be observed in the context of religious peacebuilding and peace education, even if the term is not

[23] Smith, 'The Influence of Education,' 9.
[24] Cited in Smith, 'The Influence of Education,' 3.
[25] Gill and Niens, 'Education as Humanisation,' 12.
[27] Ibid., 12.
[28] Ibid., 16-21.
[29] Bajaj, ''Critical' Peace Education,' 137.
[30] Gill and Niens, 'Education as Humanisation,' 19.

used as such. The relevance of these concepts in the accounts of the interviewees from TFF will be explored in more detail later but based on connections between TFF's description of its work and the concepts presented here it can be argued that the work of TFF constitutes both religious peacebuilding and peace education with the goal of building positive peace. In the next part another important facet of TFF's work, interfaith dialogue, is explored in the framework provided by the social identity theory.

2.2. Social Identity and Dialogue

One of the most influential and cited theories on group identities is the social identity theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner which was first conceived in 1979. It started as a theory on intergroup relations, focusing especially on questions of conflict and cooperation between groups, and is built around Tajfel's classic definition of social identity as an 'individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership.' These social groups can vary from general demographic categories to small teams, but their essence is that they give the group members a shared identity as well as set them apart from other social groups.[31]

Group membership is intrinsically linked to a person's self-concept as well as how others perceive the person, which leads to efforts to make one's own ingroup[32] positively stand out against other groups. This is why people tend to seek positive distinctiveness for their ingroup based on *subjective belief structures,* which refers to perceived nature of the relationship between particular in- and outgroups also known as *status*. An unfavourable status can be addressed in multiple ways including an individual seeking to obtain an ingroup identity of a more favourable group, groups changing the subject of comparison to a lower status outgroup or groups engaging in actual social competition over the status, which can have serious consequences for peace.[33]

Despite this tendency of status comparisons leading to intergroup rivalry, it is also possible to engage social identities to combat intergroup conflict. The most obvious way perhaps would be to combine all the groups under one 'subordinate group' but such efforts are often difficult since people are naturally attached to their pre-existing groups. Studies have found different forms of cross-categorization to be more effective, since they are usually experienced as less threatening to one's identity. In such categorizations all groups remain

[31] Hogg, 'Social Identity Theory,' 6.
[32] The group a person belongs to vs. outgroup as the social group formed by others.
[33] Hogg, 'Social Identity Theory,' 7-8.

categorically distinct but are aware that they share common identity in other dimensions.[34] Mckweon, Haji and Ferguson draw further conclusions on the relationship between social identity and peace and argue for the need of a more detailed understanding on how people navigate multiple identities and how collective action grounded in an understanding of social identities can contribute to building positive peace. [35] This in part is something that this study also touches upon.

The social identity theory was later expanded on with the self-categorization theory which posits that social groups are categorised by *prototypes* – sets of interrelated attributes, such as behaviour and attitudes that represent similarity within the ingroup and distinctiveness from outgroups. Self-categorisation easily leads to not only to a person adopting behaviours etc. congruent with the ingroup but also to viewing members of an outgroup as a stereotypical representation of their group rather than as an individual.[36] This *depersonalisation* naturally has consequences for both personal as well as group interactions, or intergroup dialogue, which will be addressed next.

2.2.1. Intergroup Dialogue

When it comes to actually defining intergroup dialogue Lipaz presents a definition that sees it as 'structured conversations' between people from different social groups - such as different ethnicities, cultures or religions. He claims that intergroup dialogues have been conducted in international, community and academic levels with positive results. Furthermore, he suggests that intergroup dialogue consists of two kinds of processes on two different levels: psychological processes within an individual and communication processes between individuals.[37]

Nagda and Maxwell align more with the critical paradigm and see intergroup dialogue as 'a co-facilitated learning endeavour that brings together members of two or more social identity groups to build relationships across cultural and power differences, to raise consciousness of inequalities, to explore the similarities and differences in experiences across identity groups, and to strengthen individual and collective capacities to promote social justice.'[38] While sharing many similarities with Lipaz's definition, theirs is more closely

[34] Hogg, 'Social Identity Theory,' 8.
[35] Mckweon, Ferguson and Haji, 369-370.
[36] Hogg, 'Social Identity Theory,' 8-9.
[37] Lipaz, 'A Dialogue with the 'Self',' 1.
[38] Nagda and Maxwell, 'Deepening The Layers Of Understanding,' 2.

aligned with the goals of obtaining both negative and positive peace, where it important to address not only intergroup conflicts, but also issues like structural and cultural violence.

According to Nagda, four communication processes characterize intergroup dialogue. First is *appreciating difference* which refers to an openness to learning and an appreciation of the point of view of others. Second, *engaging self* means an active participation in not only sharing but also addressing difficult issues. Third, *critical reflection* references the process of focusing on the persons own perspective and experiences and those of others through the examination of privilege and inequality. And fourth, *alliance building* is the process of not only addressing disagreements and conflicts but also finding ways to collaborate towards positive social changes.[39]

Nagda and Maxwell are representatives of a *critical-dialogic approach* to intergroup dialogue developed at the University of Michigan, which offers a closer look at how intergroup dialogue can be used in peacebuilding. What sets it apart from other approaches to intergroup dialogue is that it focuses on and addresses intergroup tensions such as those stemming from difference, misconceptions, social identity and social inequalities. It does so through structured, facilitated and sustained conversations across group boundaries.[40] Much of the value of the critical-dialogic approach is indeed in the fact that unlike many other approaches to intergroup dialogue, it not only focuses on similarities and building cooperation but also works with differences and inequalities.

To explore this approach further, a study of its components is required. For Nagda and Maxwell the *dialogic* part refers to building meaningful self-other relationships. This can be done through storytelling and other forms of sharing as well as empathic listening and interpersonal enquiry, reflecting closely the storytelling method employed by TFF. Again, the richness of the approach is evident in the fact that it seeks not only to increase understanding of different perspectives on the issues in question but also to foster appreciation of the experiences that lead to those perspectives. The purpose is for participants to not only learn to listen and share but also to reflect on their learning and to ask questions. Ideally, all of this provides a way to fully explore differences and commonalities when it comes to social identity groups.[41]

[39] Ibid., 6.
[40] Zúñiga, Lopez and Ford, 'Intergroup Dialogue: Critical Conversations about Difference and Social Justice,' 9-10.
[41] Nagda and Maxwell, 'Deepening The Layers Of Understanding,' 5.

When it comes to the *critical* facet of the approach, it is important to note as seen earlier that both intergroup dialogue and social identity theory contain an awareness of power differences and dominant-subordinate relationships between different identity groups. As such, the critical part of the dialogic-critical approach seeks to address this power dynamic and its impact on personal and social identities through, not only increasing awareness, but also fostering the sense of responsibility for redressing these inequalities as well as promoting social justice.[42]

Altogether the dialogic-critical approach can be viewed as working through two different stages. First, the sharing of and engaging with narratives, often grounded in identities and experiences of privilege or social exclusion, creates cross-group relationships and a better understanding of commonalities and differences. In the second stage, the power of this awareness and these relationships is harnessed in analysing the structural inequalities as well as their impact. This then ideally leads to willingness to work towards transformative social change. Through such a process it is possible, and even sensible, to focus both on building cross-group relationships as well as addressing existing conflicts.[43]

For the purpose of studying an educational program like TFF, it is also important to note how intergroup dialogue relates to education specifically. Zuniga, Lopez and Ford for their part discuss intergroup dialogue as a social justice educational practice that can be used both in educational as well as community settings. They argue that as an educational practice it draws on many critical educational orientations such as critical, feminist, democratic, and experiential pedagogies. Like these social justice pedagogies, intergroup dialogue also focuses on addressing social group biases and inequalities and builds capacity for joint social action.[44] Here it is easy to draw connections to peace education, which was discussed earlier and especially its critical strategy that also emphasises understanding and addressing social justice issues. This creates an interesting connection, which suggests that dialogue methods can be a beneficial form of peace education as well.

Based on these theories, it can be argued that intergroup dialogue is a process of somewhat structured interactions between different groups of people defined by a shared social identity that seeks to both increase understanding and to create change, whether on the level of an individual's perceptions or on the societal level. But it is also vital for

[42] Nagda and Maxwell, 'Deepening The Layers Of Understanding,' 5.
[43] Ibid., 5-6.
[44] Zúñiga, Lopez and Ford, 'Intergroup Dialogue: Critical Conversations About Difference, Social Identities, and Social Justice,' 1-2.

understanding TFF, an interfaith program, to study the relationship between intergroup and interfaith dialogue, which will be the focus of the next part along with a more detailed conceptual exploration of interfaith dialogue itself.

2.2.2. Interfaith Dialogue

Religion is one central part of social identity and thus one of the facets that draws the boundaries of different social groups. This means interfaith dialogue can in fact be seen as a form of intergroup dialogue between members of different religions. This is also reflected in Lipaz's definition of intergroup dialogue presented earlier where religion is listed as a factor constituting a social group that then engages in a structured conversation. However, it is useful to examine the definitions and studies related to interfaith dialogue specifically to be able to see particularities of engaging in intergroup dialogue based on faith or religious groups.

The simplest definition of *interfaith dialogue*[45] is that of people of different faiths meeting to have a conversation. However, to use the concept in a meaningful way, more detailed descriptions are needed. Leonard Swindler, for example, proposes a definition where interfaith dialogue is seen as a conversation among people of different faiths on a common subject, where the object is for people to learn from each other in order to grow and change. He further points out that interfaith dialogue is not a debate; rather the purpose is to 'listen to the other as openly and as sympathetically as s/he can in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within as possible.' Such an approach to dialogue, Swindler argues, contains within it the potential for change within the participants.[46] Here we can see that Swindler's definition closely resembles for example the dialogic aspect of Nagda and Maxwell's definition of intergroup dialogue discussed earlier with a distinct focus on empathetic listening and interpersonal inquiry.

Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty on the other hand offer a valuable characterization of different types of interfaith dialogue: cognitive dialogue and affective dialogue. *Cognitive dialogue* in their categorization refers to dialogue aimed at exchanging information, based on the notion that to build peace, it is important that all parties have correct factual information about the beliefs and practices of the other party. However, *affective dialogue* on the other hand encourages participants to share personal stories or compare personal narratives. This can lead not only to self-discovery but also finding 'the other in themselves'. For Abu-Nimer,

[45] Interfaith dialogue can also be referred to as interreligious dialogue, but I have elected to use the term interfaith dialogue as it is the one used by TFF themselves.
[46] Smock,. 'Introduction,' 6.

Khoury and Welty the affective dialogue reaches further than a purely cognitive one and touches upon the ultimate questions of life. They also argue that affective dialogue has the advantage of being able to also address questions of culture, economy and politics through personal narratives.[47] Such personal narratives are, of course, also at the heart of TFF's storytelling method.

Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty in fact also talk directly about story-telling as a form of interfaith dialogue, creating an interesting point of reference for TFF's work. They see it as a way to combine both cognitive and affective dialogue. According to them, storytelling 'encourages participants to express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs from a personal point of view', which can make discussion of controversial topics, such as bad intergroup experiences or conflicting beliefs, easier to discuss. It also allows for articulation of common values and concepts which can further ease the process and make it less divisive.[48] Again a very similar idea can also be found in Nagda and Maxwell's dialogic part of intergroup dialogue, where meaningful intergroup relationships and understanding of the realities of the other are curated through for example storytelling and empathetic listening.

David Smock for his part addresses the role interfaith dialogue can play in peacebuilding in particular. He clarifies the importance of interfaith dialogue even in situations of peace to address underlying issues such as prejudice and to build trust, so in a sense addressing intergroup relations and social identity questions discussed earlier. Smock also draws attention to the fact that interfaith dialogue can happen on many levels and in many different forms. For example, he talks about more elite forms of interfaith dialogue between religious leaders and institutions but also highlights the role of grassroots interfaith dialogue, such as TFF's work, as a mechanism of cross-community dialogue.[49]

Sarah Bernstein uses the term interreligious dialogue to refer to this sort of more grassroots level dialogue. She defines the term as a dialogue taking place 'between people of different religions whose aim is to build relationships in order to improve inter-communal relations and work together for social change and justice.' She sees interreligious dialogue as something taking place between individuals and, through them, communities, with the aim of 'rehumanizing' the other. This happens through interpersonal encounters where faith as an important part of a person's identity provides a common meeting point. What follows these encounters is the development of relationships and the building of trust, for example through

[47] Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, 'Unity in Diversity,' 16-17.
[48] Ibid., 18.
[49] Smock, 'Introduction,' 6-8.

the exploration of similarities and differences, correction of misconceptions and learning about each other's lives, which closely resembles the cognitive and affective form of interfaith dialogue theorized by Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty. The whole concept of rehumanizing could also be seen as a way to address the consequences of depersonalisation related to self-categorisation as observed in the social identity theory, the idea being that rehumanization helps people to again perceive the individuality of members of the out-group as well.

Bernstein also sees people coming together to work towards social change as an important continuum of interreligious dialogue in order for interreligious dialogue to play a role in peacebuilding.[50] If Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty's definition bore a close resemblance to Nagda and Maxwell's dialogic part of intergroup dialogue, this result Bernstein is calling for is quite reflective of their critical facet of intergroup dialogue. Such an idea of interfaith dialogue's relation to peacebuilding is echoed by Smock who also points out that interfaith dialogue can go beyond mere words and encompass common actions towards peace and better societies. [51] It can also be noted that such an outcome could be sought for through critical peace education or intergroup dialogue as a social justice pedagogy as discussed earlier.

Anna Halafoff also examines the role of interfaith dialogue in peacebuilding efforts. For her, the greatest value interfaith dialogue brings to the table is its ability to humanize 'the other' through positive experiences of difference[52], a sentiment similar to Bernstein. David Vishanoff too touches upon this same dynamic in his analysis which shows that interfaith dialogue can move from encounter to interaction and at the same time lead to the redrawing of communal boundaries and the perceived social identity.[53] This then brings us back to where we started with the social identity theory and the ways in which it can be utilized in peacebuilding. We have also been able to observe that the definitions of interfaith dialogue closely resemble those of intergroup dialogue, which is quite natural since interfaith dialogue can indeed be understood as a form of intergroup dialogue grounded in religion and religious identities. However, this also means that the particularities and potential of religious peacebuilding come into play, setting interfaith dialogue apart. Before we move on to

[50] Bernstein, 'Is 'interreligious' synonymous with 'interfaith'?' 108-113.
[51] Smock, 'Introduction,' 6-8.
[52] Halafoff, 'Encounter as Conflict,' 276-278.
[53] Vishanoff, 'Boundaries and Encounters,' 361-362.

methodological considerations, it is however necessary due to the specific nature of this study to take a closer look at the participants of interfaith dialogue.

2.2.3. Participants of the Dialogue

First distinct feature of the participants in the interfaith dialogue format being studied is that they are youth. The definitions of who constitute youth are varied, the UNSCR2250 for example defines 'youth' as anyone between the ages of 18 and 29, whereas Finnish law considers anyone under 29 'youth'. However, in light of these, and many more, varying definitions it is perhaps more apt to use a common definition of the youth as persons who are in the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood for example socially, economically and physically/psychologically.

The question that follows is, how does the fact that the participants are youth set this project apart from mainstream peacebuilding or interfaith programs. Simpson in his independent progress study on youth and peace and security that included interviews with over 4000 youth found that youth understand peace as both 'ending violence and addressing its symptoms' and 'engaging the underlying causes of corruption, inequality and social injustice', so effectively in terms of both positive and negative peace. He also found that they considered it necessary to building peace to bridge divides both horizontally within their communities, similarly to TFF, and vertically between young people and the state. Simpson also argues that youth-led peacebuilding efforts are critically important due to their capacity to reach and mobilize their peers and to understand the unique dynamics and priorities of the youth.[54]

When it comes to youth engaging in interfaith dialogue, while many researchers note importance of engaging the youth in interfaith dialogue, not a lot of research exists on the actual engagement of youth in interfaith dialogue. One such study by Cornelio and Saliera in the context of the Philippines found that the youth favor breaking of prejudice and creating intergroup relationships, termed 'living dialogue', over more traditional forms of theological dialogue. They also emphasize the joint engagement in community projects as an important form of youth interfaith dialogue in this context. [55] Sarah Talcott on the other hand, looking at the issue through the example of United Religions Initiative (URI), sees interfaith dialogue as building understanding and respect between different people – and youth as vital contributors and catalysts due to their curiosity, idealism and open-heartedness. She also brings attention

[54] Simpson, 'The Missing Peace,' 8-9
[55] Cornelio and Saliera, 'Youth in Interfaith Dialogue,' 58-59.

to the potential of youth as leaders and youth-led projects,[56] an area that has received very little attention by researchers and what this study also seeks to address.

These few studies offer us some idea of how the youth might position themselves when it comes to peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue. Simpson's study would indicate that the youth hold a more comprehensive view of what peace is, reflecting Galtung's theories on negative and positive peace, and see the need to bridge divisions between groups of people. Both Cornelio and Saliera as well as Talcott seem to suggest that a similar focus on improving intergroup relationships also exists when youth engage in interfaith dialogue.

However, to understand how TFF and the interviewees engage in interfaith dialogue, and to support a more comprehensive view of interfaith dialogue and especially its grassroots level, it became necessary to examine what it means to be a 'person of faith' who takes part in interfaith dialogue. In contrast to a more traditional and rigid understanding of religiosity, the concept of *lived religion* is used here. The study of lived religion focuses on how religion factors into the everyday life, thoughts and actions of regular people or *laypeople*.[57] The self-determination of people on what they perceive as religious is key but the role of culture and history in shaping these perceptions is also recognized. Additionally, as the lived religion research has typically actively challenged more traditional ways of studying religions, questions of power and experiences of marginalized groups have often been central in the study of lived religion, making it quite suitable for the context of this study.[58]

McGuire addresses questions of power and of outside influence on individual's lived religiosity through her examination of the role of identity in lived religion. She argues that in reality antisyncretic (religious) group identities, that are often viewed as normative, are continually contested. At the level of individual's lived religion, she states that 'religious socialization and ongoing interactions with others may inform, but cannot determine, each individual's personal practices and beliefs' and that the individual might hold more than one religious identity.[59] Such interpretations of religiosity and identity are helpful in understanding religiosity at a very grassroots level and non-formal context such as TFF.

However, even the lived religion perspective fails to address the role of those who don't identify as religious in interfaith dialogue. So far there has been little academic research on the participation of atheists, agnostics and other religiously unaffiliated in interfaith

[56] Sarah Talcott, 'Youth Leadership: A Catalyst for Global Good' 75-82.
[57] Kupari and Vuola, 10.
[58] Ibid., 18-20.
[59] McGuire,'Lived Religion,' 208-209.

dialogue, although their inclusion seems somewhat common in practice. Of course, one could theoretically question whether their participation would constitute inter*faith* dialogue at all or argue that then we should talk for example about inter*cultural* dialogue. There has indeed long been a debate on where is the line between culture and religion or whether they are in fact different entities to begin with. However, this ongoing debate on the relationship or border between religion and culture is not the focus of this study. And for example, in the case of TFF religion and experiences of being part of a religious identity group are central to the work, thus making it arguably interfaith dialogue which is further supported by their own self-definition of their work as such.

In addition, as noted interfaith activist Mohamed Imran Mohamed Taib argues, only by including the religious nones is true plurality of the dialogue maintained[60]. And taking a look at the purposes of interfaith dialogue discussed earlier, especially from the point of view of peacebuilding, it appears indeed somewhat problematic to exclude this significant, and growing[61], part of the population from the dialogue.

Shoemaker and Edmonds offer a rare insight into the inclusion of religious nones, meaning those who do not profess any religious identity, in interfaith dialogue initiatives they have studied. They found serious challenges in the inclusion of these religious nones due to what they call the *interfaith identity paradigm*, which refers to the strong reliance of these programs on purely religious identity. This meant that while Shoemaker and Edmonds found that while most of the interfaith programs tried to include atheists, agnostics, the unaffiliated and the nonreligious, these participants found it hard to fully take part due to the practise of participants identifying themselves through their religious affiliation and due to heavy reliance of the work on traditionally religious concepts and ways of speaking. Instead they advocate for a way to engage in dialogue that acknowledges and values the multiple -also unsure or developing- identities people hold in addition to the traditional view of religious identity. [62] Finding a way to make such inclusion is important as the inclusion of the nones has the potential to enrich and broaden the perspectives of interfaith dialogue,[63] as could be argued is the case with TFF, where they seem to have managed to find a way to engage in dialogue inclusive of different (non-)religious identities.

[60] Taib, '"Nones" in Interfaith Dialogue.'
[61] Both Taib as well as Shoemaker and Edmonds note the rise in the number of religious nones.
[62] Shoemaker and Edmonds, 'The Limits of Interfaith?' 203-209.
[63] Taib, '"Nones" in Interfaith Dialogue.'

In this study the concept of religious peacebuilding provides a framework for understanding how religion through interfaith dialogue can contribute to peacebuilding. Further, peace education gives us an insight into peacebuilding within an educational setting where TFF mostly work, whereas understanding the different aspects of peace outline the areas where the peacebuilding is focused on. The recognition of interfaith dialogue as intergroup dialogue on the other hand enables us to utilize both the concepts of social identity and intergroup relations as well as approaches such as the dialogic-critical approach in studying the TFF program. Before building on this foundation in the analysis, the methodology of this study is discussed in detail.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Data and Data Collection

In this chapter the practical and methodological considerations related to the data of this study are explored. First, some foundational choices will be covered such as the theoretical paradigm and the use of qualitative research methods over quantitative. After that the approach and practice of data collection and sampling will be covered in detail before moving on to cover the actual interview process. Following that, the nature of the data collected will be described along with ethical considerations specific to this study. Lastly, before we move on to the actual analysis of the data, the analysis method used – qualitative content analysis - will be presented in detail.

Moving on to the foundations of this study, a *qualitative* approach was chosen as it became apparent that it best suited both the research paradigm and the research question. As the purpose of this study is to illustrate how youth understand and engage with both interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding, it seemed that a qualitative approach would yield the deeper understanding to the question, which was the goal. Of course, this means that no wider generalizations can be made on the basis of this study, but such is not the intention. Patton describes this contribution of qualitative inquiry *illuminating meanings*, where qualitative inquiry studies, documents, analyses and interprets how people construct and attach meaning to things.[64]

This is closely tied to the constructionist paradigm that this study relies on. The key tenet of the constructionist approach is that humans interpret and construct the reality around them and any perceived phenomenological essence is a social construct.[65] Such social constructs can for example be a result of people interacting in what Rubin and Rubin term a *cultural arena*, which is a setting where people have matters such as religion, history or work in common.[66] In fact, they view culture as the expectations and meanings through which the world is interpreted and that are passed on through generation. Following from this, constructionist also view intercultural differences and cultural membership as social constructs, a view which will become relevant when discussing social identities.

The constructivist paradigm also affects the realities of conducting research. As all meaning is viewed as socially constructed, it naturally follows that the interviewer and interview process is viewed as part of this construction process rather than objectively

[64] Patton, 'Qualitative Research,' 13.
[65] Ibid., 121.
[66] Rubin and Rubin, 'Philosophy of Qualitative Interviewing,' 17-18.

depicting reality.[67] This also means that the researchers own cultural assumptions affect the process for instance in what they ask and how they construe what they hear. While such cultural assumptions are considered a natural part of human understanding in constructionism, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of their own cultural assumption lest they cloud the meanings the interviewee brings forward.[68]

The relevance of the cultural aspect in the constructivist approach makes it particularly interesting also for this study as the questions that TFF works in many ways touch on areas that are subject to such influences, such as religion and majority-minority relations. The qualitative constructionist approach to the study allows us to dig deep into how the active members of TFF construct their understanding of the topics related to their work and the actual work they do, thus best answering the research question.

3.1.1. Data Collection

To achieve this, this study is mainly built on in-depth interviews with these active members of TFF. Originally the purpose was also to observe a meeting of the actives to see how they jointly construct their understandings and work, however covid-19 made this impossible. Instead, an art exhibition arranged by the TFF on the topic of their work was studied to see how they depict their work in that format. However, the interviews are the main data source of this study as they allow for a deeper reflection on the issues by the actives.

The interviews rely heavily on what Patton terms *purposeful sampling* both in the selection of the program under investigation and the interviewees themselves. This method of sampling was chosen because it was concurrent with the goal of this study: an in-depth understanding of the specific case. Purposeful sampling relies on information rich cases, meaning cases where 'one can learn a great deal of information about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.' In the case of the selection of the program under study, for example, the determination of its relevance was based on their self-description as a youth-led interfaith dialogue program and the fact that several of their goals spoke to ways and objectives of building positive peace in a society.

Likewise, the relevance of the interviewees was evaluated through the lens of purposeful sampling. After the program had been approached and their willingness to participate in this study was confirmed, the call for interviewees was open to all active members of TFF. They were provided with a short description of the study and its goals along

[67] Patton, 'Qualitative Research,' 122.
[68] Rubin and Rubin, 'Philosophy of Qualitative Interviewing,' 18.

with details on practicalities of the research process. They could then independently sign up to be part of this study and set up an interview. In total five interviews were set up right away with a sixth coming later in the process, which altogether covered a majority of the active members of TFF. This was the basis on which the purposefulness of the sampling was evaluated, along with discussing the individual activity of each interviewee: all of whom were currently and/or had previously been involved in executing and shaping the work of TFF. Some of the interviewees were employed by Ad Astra to work on the project, but the distinction between an employee and an active member seems to be rather low, and TFF works rather independently from the main organisation Ad Astra. Based on this and the fact that all interviewees had indeed taken part in shaping the activities and direction of TFF, they were all concluded to be valuable informants in studying how TFF constructs their work.

The interviewees, five women and one man, all young people in their twenties, have a background in or ties to different religions and religious groups, such as Lutheran and Orthodox Christianity, Sunni and Sufi Islam and Judaism, although not all of them count themselves as actively religious at the time of the interviews. Some of them have never had a specific religious identity to begin with. The implications of this for the study were considered, however it was decided that their participation was valid as they considered the TFF program and themselves engaging in interfaith dialogue. In fact, this provided an unanticipated opportunity to study the engagement of different kinds of non-religious people's (for example agnostics or former members of certain religious groups) engagement in this type of interfaith dialogue.

However, as the sample and the whole number of participants in the TFF program is relatively small, no identifying detail, whether concerning age, sex or religiosity, will be provided with later excerpts from the interviews in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. While this might have implications for fully interpreting the excerpts in context, it was considered more important to maintain full confidentiality of the interviewees as the topics and personal narratives that were discussed are very personal in nature and can have implications to the life and safety of the interviewees outside of this study.

This study employs what Patton calls *interpersonal interview*, which relies on open-ended questions and probing for more information in order to study people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feeling and knowledge on the topic in question. [69] In format the interviews were semi-structured, meaning that an *interview protocol* was prepared with an

[69] Patton, 'Qualitative Research,' 36.

outline of questions that would cover all the necessary topics of the study (see appendix 1).[70] However, as the semi-structured description might suggest, this guide was not followed to the letter and the format and order of the questions was adapted to the flow of each interview while still making sure that all necessary topics were covered during the interview. In addition to the main questions on the interview protocol, follow-up questions were at times used to explore particular concepts and ideas introduced by the interviewees and probes were utilised in clarifying certain aspects of interviewee's account[71]

The interview protocol was also tested and improved upon through a pilot interview conducted with one of the interviewees who had long been a part of TFF. The interview served as a full part of the data collection but was also followed by a review discussion where feedback on the questions and interview dynamic were asked for and received. This pilot interview was an important step to check the relevance and function of the questions in addressing the topics under study and making sure that nothing vital was excluded due to lack of familiarity with the program or due to researcher bias – such as discussed earlier in relation to the constructionist paradigm.[72] This issue was also addressed during the interview process, by paying close attention to ensuring that the interviewers own preconceptions or the commonly expressed views from previous interviews would not bias the current interview and that new perspectives on the issues under discussion could arise to provide fresh perspectives or disconfirming evidence to prior findings. Such new perspectives were in fact found in some of the latter interviews enriching the data set.

Interviews were conducted over a period of a little over four months, the length of which was mostly due to Christmas holiday period falling in the middle of it as well as having to reschedule some interviews. In the beginning of the process the interviewees were offered the chance to do the interview in person or online according to their personal preference amidst the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. However, worsening of the situation with the second wave of infections meant that majority (5 out of 6) of the interviews had to be conducted online. Possible implications of this for the comfort level and willingness of the participants to share their personal accounts in these circumstances was considered and acknowledged, but safety considerations, with the researcher being part of an at-risk group medically, won out in the end. In accordance, all efforts were made to make the online interviews as comfortable and secure for the interviewees as possible, and fortunately many of them independently

[70] Rubin and Rubin, 'Structuring the Interview,' 145.
[71] Ibid., 127.
[72] Drisko and Maschi, 'Qualitative Content Analysis,' 101.

disclosed after the interview that they had felt very comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences in this interview setting.

Originally, as mentioned earlier, it was also planned to take part in one of the meetings of TFF actives planning their work in order to study how they construct their understanding and practice of the program collectively. However, the covid-19 pandemic unfortunately paused such meetings for the time being so participatory observation of them became impossible. Instead, it was suggested an exhibition of their work they were at the time hosting in Trapesa in Espoo might provide valuable insight. A visit to the exhibition revealed it to be a thorough description of the work and history of TFF combined with feedback received from participants in their workshops. This was deemed an interesting addition and included in the data set of this study.

3.1.2. Data

Data from interpersonal interviews naturally consists of transcriptions and quotations from the interviews and enough information on the relevant context enable their interpretation.[73] All the interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the interviewees and these tapes where then transcribed in verbatim by me personally to form the core material of the study. All recordings and transcripts were stored on my personal electronic device (not on cloud-services) which is only accessible by myself to maintain data confidentiality and will be deleted upon the completion of this study. The interviews lasted anywhere between 0,5 and 1,5 hours and all together the length of the transcription was roughly 70 pages. In individual cases some relevant details came up in follow up discussions after the actual interview and recording had stopped. In these cases, written notes were made of them, with the permission of the interviewee, to also possibly be used in the analysis. All of the interviews were conducted in English based on the preference of the interviewees, so no translation was needed for the use of the data in this thesis.

The exhibition discussed earlier forms a secondary data set for this study. It included information rich descriptions of the program and its history that illuminate how the program is viewed by its active members and what is given special weight in its presentation. Also enclosed in the exhibit was feedback from participants of their workshops. Based on my discussion with the main curator of this exhibit, some 18 feedback placards were chosen from a great deal more, since such feedback is typically gathered in most workshops. While this also gives an interesting look into how the program is viewed and their workshops

[73] Patton, 'Qualitative Research,' 36.

experienced by outsiders, it is not sufficient data to make conclusions about, for example, the efficacy of the TFF in reaching its goals. However, the choice of which material to include speaks here to what kind of outcomes are valued by the program and therefore presented in the exhibition. All of the data from the exhibit was preserved for the use of this study through photographs taken at the site.

3.1.3. Research Ethics

Some of the issues relevant for the ethical considerations were already referenced when discussing the data collection. First and foremost, significant attention was placed on obtaining informed consent. The participants were informed of the purpose and practice of the study and could then independently reach out and state their interest in taking part in the survey, thereby avoiding any personal pressure to take part. Only exception to this occurred with the sixth participant who joined later, in which case they were asked directly if they too would like to participate on an occasion where the study in general was discussed. In this case too all effort was made to assure them that their participation, while surely meaningful, was completely voluntary.

In addition to making sure participation was indeed truly voluntary, the participants were clearly informed of what exactly they were consenting to by participating in the study. The actual consent form detailed again the purpose and practices of the study, including anonymity and data confidentiality measures. The form was sent to interviewees in advance and was also gone through in detail before the interview and before they signed it or gave verbal recorded consent. It was also explained in detail that they could withdraw their consent at any point during or after the interview, or that they could refrain from answering any particular questions during the interview.

Related to this informed consent was the assurance of maintaining anonymity of the respondents due to the sensitive nature of the topics. As discussed earlier this will also be reflected in how the data will be presented later on by carefully excluding any identifiable details. The importance of this is related to two particular concerns: firstly, many of the interviewees shared very personal stories when discussing the topics or their work, which they might not wish to share where they could be identified. Secondly, religious affiliation can be a sensitive topic and interfaith dialogue is by no means universally accepted practice and discussing these without full anonymity could at worst even place some interviewees in danger. For these reasons, the ethical consideration of doing no harm to the interviewees[74]

[74] Rubin and Rubin, 'Philosophy of Qualitative Interviewing,' 23.

outweighed the possibility of presenting a deeper level of analysis on some of the topics by including demographic details.

Last important ethical consideration relates to accurately representing what the interviewees have shared.[75] Achieving this requires, naturally, for great care to be taken in the transcription process to make sure everything the interviewees have said is transcribed correctly and that other relevant reactions, such as emotions expressed in relation to specific topics are also noted so that their relevance to the interpretation can be explored. All of this, in fact, feeds into one of the mechanisms used to ensure the validity of this study, which is to employ thick, rich descriptions to provide the reader with enough material to assess the interpretations of the researcher.[76] Only changes made to the text of the transcriptions in the quotations presented in the analysis is to adjust grammar to be more understandable or to cut non-significant repetition of certain words or phrases. In these cases, special care was taken to ensure that the actual content and meaning of the quotation is not affected.

3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

The data in this study is analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. Mayring, one of the main theorists of qualitative content analysis, describes it as consisting of a set of techniques for the systematic analysis of different kind of texts that does not focus only on manifest content but also the themes and core ideas of text. What follows is that qualitative content analysis focuses on meaning found in texts and acknowledges that it is often complex and contextual. Sandelowski further describes qualitative content analysis as follows: 'qualitative content analysis defines itself ... as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification.' [77]

The goal of qualitative content analysis is to identify patterns, categories and themes that summarize the full data set or highlight key content.[78] While this means that qualitative content analysis is largely understood as a descriptive in focus, it can also be used to explore new ways of thinking and conceptualizing. [79] In either case, the heart of the method is in the process of *coding*. This refers to the process in which the researcher immerses themselves in the data in order to get a full contextual understanding of it and formulate the categories that

[75] Rubin and Rubin, 'Philosophy of Qualitative Interviewing,' 23.
[76] Creswell and Miller, 'Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry,' 128-129.
[77] Drisko and Maschi, 'Qualitative Content Analysis,' 85-86.
[78] Ibid., 86-88.
[79] Ibid., 93.

are central part of the analysis. All in all, the purpose of coding is to 'develop new knowledge and to address fully the research question that frames the study.'[80]

In coding the data set in qualitative content analysis, the relevant categories can be defined inductively or deductively or as a combination of the two. In inductive coding the categories arise from the material itself and are labelled descriptively or *in vivo*, meaning that a word or phrase from the data is used to describe the category. The preliminary categories are then developed further and arranged hierarchically.[81] In deductive coding on the other hand at least some of the categories are developed from the framework of an orienteering theory or pre-existing literature.[82] In both ways of coding, however, it is important to use reliability checks to make sure the coding frame is congruent with the data. Likewise, it is considered highly important to clearly illustrate to the reader how the codes were derived and to present sufficient raw data to support these choices.[83]

In this thesis an inductive approach to coding was used. This means that the data was carefully examined several times and central themes in each data set were carefully marked down. These were then examined in relation to one another, leading to interlinked categories being combined and arranged under four main categories. The categories were then again checked against the data to ensure that they fit the material from which they were derived and don't exclude any other significant points of view present in the data. The categories naturally have certain linkages to the theoretical foundation of the study, but this arises from the influence of that foundation on the interview protocol and questions, not the actual coding process itself. In the next section the data and these categories will be presented following a narrative format, where each of the core categories resulting from the coding process are explored in detail.

[80] Ibid.,102.
[81] Drisko and Maschi, 'Qualitative Content Analysis,' 104-106.
[82] Ibid., 106.
[83] Ibid.,104-107.

4. Analysis

In the previous section the methodology of the data collection and the method of data analysis were covered in detail. Next, the four main categories resulting from the coding process will be discussed in more detail and in relation to the theoretical foundation presented earlier.

4.1. Focusing on Stories

One of the most discussed themes both during the interview and in the exhibition were those relating directly to the methodology and concrete work of what TFF does. This is naturally also central for answering the research questions, both as the concrete way in which they engage in interfaith dialogue and as a way to reach their overall goals. Therefore, this part will examine how this work is described in the material. This will also function as a helpful foundation for the other main categories, as it gives more insight into the concrete workings of the program.

As noted earlier, the storytelling workshops form the most central aspect of TFF's work and were therefore also the most often discussed part of their work in the data sets – being mentioned in all of them. According to TFF the storytelling workshops aim to facilitate 'much-needed dialogue on faith, responsibility, power and alliance' and are suitable for primary schools, upper secondary schools and universities.[84] These target groups already indicate to us that the main target of the program are the youth of different ages, making their work explicitly youth to youth, since TFF itself is also a youth-led program. Interviewee 1 points out to the significance of this:

> I think TFF is very effective in this matter because the people who are running this project they are the youth themselves and the youth they are aware of what problems they have… The target group is youth so it would be easier from youth to youth, not like big adults that just give us like information about what to do.

Here they point out that the youth have a better understanding about how to approach other youth and what issues are relevant to them, a sentiment echoed earlier by Simpson on the relevance of youth engagement in peacebuilding. Interviewee 1 also seems to suggest that the youth are more open to listening to other youth, a factor that could be particularly significant in a format based on storytelling, such as the one TFF employs.

According to the interviewees, the actual workshops consist of two storytellers telling their preconstructed stories. These stories are constructed as a part of the training each of the

[84] Exhibition, image 1.

storytellers receive. They are trained in the specific storytelling method Ad Astra brought over from the sister-program, Tilsammans för Sverige, as well as being educated about subjects like privilege, stereotypes, antiracism, culture and religion[85] in order to construct a story suitable to TFF's work. Interviewee 3 describes this process in the following way:

> [The training includes] thinking about yourself, the community, your identity, the world, the structures in it and then kind of building up the story. We all have so many stories but building up one story that has something important to you.

Some of the topics that the stories touch upon alongside religion can be noted here. It is also good to note that the young storytellers themselves construct the narratives and choose in part what experiences, identity or message they are basing it on, and thus how they are engaging in interfaith dialogue as well.

One important aspect of the storytelling method TFF employs is its use of dramatization in making the stories more impactful. Employing a drama teacher, the youth are taught how to engage senses associated with the stories and memories they are sharing to grab the attention of the listener. This seems to be one of the definite strengths of this method, with many of the feedbacks incorporated in the exhibition commenting positively on the experience of listening to the stories.[86] Interviewees 5 and 6 discuss this aspect of the method:

> You use their attention in a good way that you talk about important things that affected you through the story and the same time, you don't lose attention of the listener. That is amazing, so the tool number one is the storytelling.

> As I said previously, about how we try to bring in like all sorts of different, like tactile feeling and smells and tastes and how that sort of transports people into an experience or a situation, and I think that's really cool. How storytelling casts that sort of—it has a way where it can actually sort of get to people in a different way other than just having a lecture and stating things or facts or theories. Yeah, so it's more concrete or more personal.

Such use of the senses seems to function in a way that helps the listener to both stay interested in the story and to make it more relatable. Since empathetic listening and relating to the storyteller's experience is considered an important facet of using storytelling as a method in both Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty's definitions of interfaith dialogue and Nagda and Maxwell's intergroup dialogue, it can be argued that such dramatization would make TFF's use of the storytelling method for these purposes more effective. The relation of TFF's work to these theories will be discussed in more detail throughout the analysis.

[85] As recounted by interviewee 1.
[86] Exhibition, images 2-6.

The storytelling workshops of course include more than just the stories themselves. Before the storytellers take the floor, some ice-breaker exercises are used and safe space rules are created together with the participants.[87] Then comes the actual storytelling exercise, which consists of the stories and a following exercise and discussion to reflect on the stories. Interviewee 1 describes the whole process in detail:

> After we explain our goal and what we do and having the safe space, then comes the storytelling part. So we have two storytellers, each storyteller tells their story connected to their faith. And after each story we have an exercise. The klick exercise. And starting with K L I C K and each letter has meaning. The first K means knowledge and L likeness. I for interest, C chance and K knotty, like a knot. So after the story ends we give each of these parts 10 minutes or 5 minutes for the kids or the youth to discuss about it and we ask them like what is the new knowledge that you get from this story: Did you feel like you related to the story in a way, like direct or indirect way? Or [do you] have some close people to you [in] the same circumstances? And then interest, what is the most interesting part? And in this part we give the youth the space to ask direct questions from the storytellers about like details in life or details about the story because most of the stories are very interesting and you can't just have them in 10 minutes or 15 minutes. There always can be some questions and we always get lots of questions in this part. And also with the C, the chance, we always ask them, the young people from where you can get these kinds of stories and have you heard these kinds of stories, do you want to hear these kinds of stories in the future? And the last part which is the K, knotty, this we have been changing this constantly, from time to time but in the beginning it was a question, it was a very difficult question to be honest, like how these stories have changed your perspective or affected the way that you are thinking, because that concerns the faith and the culture. But then we realized that it was difficult for the youth to express their ideas so we have changed it in a more creative way. So with this knotty part we give the youth papers with like—is it A5 with the *korttipohja*?—and papers and we give them colors and we say like try to draw something from the story, one idea that comes to your mind. And the youth they have done a very great job, I would say in that. And after that we end our workshop with gathering again in a circle if we have time. And telling with one word what each one of us got from this workshop in like one or two words.

Here it can be observed that the method is very structured in how it engages with the youth. The participants are led to carefully examine the experience and what they take away from it. It is also clear that TFF works to continuously improve on this method, for instance with changes to the format of the reflections on the final K of the KLICK method. The reflections the participants have made on paper in this part also feature prominently in the exhibition. It can be noted here that such focus on understanding of the story and point of view of others along with personal reflection and growth is reminiscent of Swindler's definition of interfaith dialogue as learning by sympathizing as source of personal growth discussed in the theoretical framework of this study. TFF also seems to emphasize engagement through asking questions, which along with reflection is a key part of Nagda and Maxwell's dialogic part of intergroup dialogue.

In the interviewee's self-definitions and descriptions, these storytelling workshops are portrayed as the central part of TFF's work. However, in the interviews and in the exhibition, other formats are also discussed regularly. One of such formats is that of what the

[87] Described by interviewee 1.

interviewees referred to as ‘food sharing events.’ Once that have been hosted so far have centered around the religious celebrations of Eid al Iftar and Holi. In these events people from different religious backgrounds got together to cook and share a meal – and more importantly stories. Interviewees 1 and 4 described the storytelling part of these events in the following way:

> And it's like it was also good that we have lots of discussions and also stories connected to this feast and people, they used to celebrate this feast—how they celebrate them and what are the traditions, what is the purpose of this food, why this food. And it’s like so [much] good information and so much fun.
>
> Then people sat down and we started sharing stories. So like sharing, people were sharing memories from their Ramadan when they were smaller. Or then like sharing stories from some other religious holidays that were a memory popping up. There was a really beautiful night.

Again, the sharing of stories becomes a central way in which different participants of these events communicated with one another as well as an important way of sharing knowledge. And as with the workshops, it could be argued that this is very much TFF’s way of doing interfaith dialogue – the sharing of stories related to personal experiences with faith, religion and culture. As discussed earlier, such forms of storytelling are recognized forms of interfaith dialogue. Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty talk about affective dialogue in relation to the sharing of stories and personal narratives such as these, a theoretical model of interfaith dialogue that seems congruent with the work of TFF on storytelling.

Another activity similar to the food sharing events that TFF has engaged in in the past is directly visiting different religious communities. In the exhibition’s outlook on the past activities of TFF it is described as TFF members visiting ‘5 different confessions communities in Finland, to learn and share knowledge.’[88] Interviewee 6 also mentions these visits and their importance in learning about the faith community and hearing from them about their daily lives. So here, learning about faith and religious communities becomes central, reflecting perhaps more Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty’s cognitive type of interfaith dialogue, which aims to ensure people have correct knowledge about the believes and practices of the other party.

These forms of engaging in interfaith dialogue are what has mostly constituted the work of TFF in the past. However, as with most of the world, the challenges and changes of the year 2020 have also resulted in some changes in the work TFF does. With the storytelling workshops paused due to covid-19 and following the rise of the Black Lives Matter

[88] Exhibition, image 6.

movement, TFF has become more focused on antiracism work as well. What started as study circles to educate members of TFF and others on antiracism and other related topics has expanded to several collaborations with different organisations and for example with the University of Helsinki around these themes. Interviewee 3 describes engaging with this focus on antiracism in the following:

> So all of us, we are trained and try to discuss with each other what we understand by it, try to bring examples and our own input into it. We build the workshops how to convey this message to the youth. What we have learned, yes, and mostly we do it by the method of storytelling, because people love to hear stories. So we try to convey all of this.

Here it is clear that TFF naturally engages with this topic too through their storytelling method, which already makes them stand out from many other organisations working on this topic. However, as interviewee 2 describes, there is another dynamic that sets TFF apart:

> We had a lot of like collaboration and like contact with other antiracist organizations and also like antiracist experts. And what I can see is that in the Finnish society, it's becoming more normal to have these organizations and they get more voice, like they get more space to do their activities but the like religious aspect is kind of lacking a lot, I would say. And it can also be quite frustrating when you try to have some collaboration with them and then like there is like no understanding of what it means, like what this religious part of the whole intersectionality means, kind of. And I think that we have quite a lot of like experience on that and how to talk about these things. And we're also more comfortable about bringing them up with during the workshops, for example … On the contrary, like other religious organizations, they may have like very good tools and methods for like talking about religion and about faith. But then maybe when it comes to talking about, for example, whiteness or about racist structures, they can sometimes get really uncomfortable. So for us, I think it's really good that we actually managed to like take in both of these aspects and then also, of course, the storytelling and this artistic way of of trying to do things like. I think that's very unique for TFF too, and I really like it.

The knowledge and expertise on religions, as well as interfaith dialogue, give TFF a different vantage point and experience in engaging with the topic. This also illustrates how religion and interfaith dialogue factor into this antiracist focus and work as well.

The purpose of this work appears to be to raise awareness of racism and discrimination and to equip people to address these issues. One example of this is the collaboration they have planned with SOCO ry and the University of Helsinki, described in detail by interviewee 2, where both staff and students are not only made aware of the racist structures in the university but also equipped and encouraged to challenge these. So, the goal is not only to address inequalities but also to build capacity for joint social action. This can be seen to reflect Zuniga, Lopez and Ford's view of intergroup dialogue as a social justice educational practice, where similar goals are central, as well as the closely related to the concept of critical peace education.

In this part the different forms of TFF's work have been discussed in detail through the descriptions of the interviewees and information included in the exhibition. This has established a thorough understanding of the practicalities of the work TFF does. It has also illustrated direct links to theoretical formats of interfaith and intergroup dialogue discussed earlier, indicating that, in light of these definitions, TFF's work can indeed be seen as interfaith and intergroup dialogue. In particular, two theoretical connections are apparent: firstly, the similarity of the TFF's storytelling activities to Swindler's concept of interfaith dialogue as learning and growth and Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty's definitions of cognitive and affective form of interfaith dialogue was observed. And secondly, the connections of their antiracism work to educational practices of intergroup dialogue and peace education seeking to address social justice issues was noted. What sets TFF apart from most programs engaging in such activities though is its youth to youth nature, which will be discussed in more detail later. The following categories also deal directly with the questions of how interviewees and TFF themselves see interfaith dialogue and what the goals of the program are.

4.2. Engaging Identity

Identity is another theme that came up in the accounts of the interviewees regularly, even if the interview protocol did not address the issue directly in the same amount, thus warranting its position as one of the main categories. Studying these accounts through the perspective of the social identity theory gives another interesting layer of understanding of how the interviewees view TFF's work and the goals of this work.

The interviewees talk about identity in relation to their work with three distinct focuses: the role of personal social identities, supporting identity exploration of participants and combating stereotypes. First of these focuses on the role of personal identities, where they discuss how their different social identities feature in their work and affect their personal motivation for participating in this work. It is important to note here that most, if not all, of the interviewees are a part of a religious, ethnic or language minority in Finland or have an immigrant background. This for one, likely explains in part the prevalence of identity discussions in the data set, since they may have more experiences of being impacted by ingroup-outgroup divisions than members of the majority. Interviewee 4, for example, addresses these experiences directly when describing their experience of being bullied as a child for belonging to a religious minority and how this has influenced their motivation to work with TFF:

> These sort of moments, I think, trigger you to towards understanding the importance [of interfaith dialogue].

It is interesting to note that in Nagda and Maxwell's dialogic-critical approach the exchange of narratives the dialogue builds on often explicitly relate to identities and experiences of privilege or social exclusion. Engaging with these narratives is then meant to create awareness and cross-group relationships that can be used foster change on, for example, structural inequalities. In this way, the role of personal identities of the participants is central in this kind of intergroup dialogue process.

But it is not only minority identities that are discussed. One of the interviewees recounts a story they tell during the storytelling exercise which centres around how they themselves were suspicious and prejudiced towards a minority group in their home country. Reflecting on this story they explain:

> And in that story, I'm that majority of people, because in many other stories, guys and girls [are] talking about being a minority in some points, and I represent the majority and how the majority can hurt the minorities.

Through these examples we can also see that the interviewees themselves are distinctly aware of the group divisions and status differences that are central to the social identity theory and that this can have consequences for intergroup relationships. In both examples, the awareness of these status differences or intergroup divisions has in part motivated them to engage with the issue through TFF.

However, TFF is also viewed by many of the interviewees as a place for them to explore and learn more about, perhaps also construct, their own identities and especially the religious aspect of them. Interviewee 2 for instance describes their feelings on not having had the chance to attend religious education in school matching their own religious identity. When reflecting on the experience they describe how it relates to them working with TFF:

> It's also like by joining TFF, it was also like a way of, for me to explore it more. What I felt like I kind of missed. Like all of these situations or moments where I could have had the chance to reflect on my religiosity and on my own faith. So like for TFF, even if it's not like specifically [interviewee mentions religious affiliation], it's still like a space where you get to learn more about yourself and you get to tell your story as well. Like why am I the way I am today. So it really felt like therapeutic also in a way very much and I got to, like test my own comfort zone and see what is there more to learn about myself.

This reflects how important the opportunity to safely explore religious identity can be and how facilitating this kind of exploration is considered an integral part of TFF. Interviewee 1 describes this process and why it is an important part of the work:

> Actually, it [identity] is the core of our stories because we don't talk about our religio[us] belief everyday. We discuss about many other things, but about religion like we don't talk about it even with ourselves. So, this is a bit blurry part of ourselves and that's why we emphasise on that. So you try to know yourself and what you believe and when you are confident in that you have more power to share it and try to have like this interfaith phase, yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, yeah, and through that you sort of communicate your identity and its importance?
>
> Exactly, yeah, and when you know your identity, you know what you want. And not everybody has like succeeded in this part like some people still like, some of the you[th] still are like struggling with that and, like we don't push on them, it's, sometimes it can be very long process.

Here it becomes evident that willingness to explore your own identity is considered important for successfully engaging in interfaith dialogue – at least in this story-telling format. Interviewer 2 agrees by stating:

> I really think that if you like, if you want to create a dialogue with another person and start to like, understand other people, you need to work on yourself too and understand who you are like, otherwise it's going to be much harder.

However, as has been mentioned earlier, not all of the interviewees identify as religious. In fact, interviewee 3 addresses this issue directly and describes other basis on which people can engage in this type of dialogue to achieve its goals:

> You know, since faith is involved it might sound like it's only for the people of religious groups—not necessarily. It could be also about culture, could be about even the lack of it. You know, for example, I'm not a religious person and I do not believe in any religion, but I'm not an atheist either. I simply do not think that we can either prove or disprove God. However, when I for example meet a person from a different religious background, I do not have to agree with them, but I can still have a respectful conversation without being prejudiced against the other person to understand why such person or such a religion exists or what exactly that religion is.

They illustrate quite clearly how they have found this form of interfaith dialogue useful and important for combating prejudice and intergroup divisions. This more than anything illustrates the importance of engaging the religious nones in this type of dialogue grounded not in theological differences and commonalities but in the desire to build more peaceful and inclusive societies. Interviewee 4 for their part describes how the participation of people who ‘don’t have religion in their lives’ has been ‘beautiful’ and ‘valuable’, also reflecting the views of Mohamed Imran Mohamed Taib discussed earlier.

In addition, they take a view reminiscent of the lived religion approach by taking time to deliberate on the topic and questioning what it means to be religious in the first place and who gets to define that. As an example, they describe how their perception of the concept is

likely to be quite different from that of their friend who grew up in the Hasidic[89] community and how they personally find belonging in two different religious communities:

> Yeah, I mean I'm, religion is something that I grew up with. It's something that shaped how I'm thinking, how I'm seeing the world. When we talk at home, my mother is really close to me. When we talk about things I think overall, like the religious thinking or the theological thinking is, it's a way of expressing yourself and seeing the world which I, which is something that I share when I meet other people of faith or people who grew up or chose to, to go into religion. And it's a certain way of like speaking or a certain language that is there, so in that sense I think I wouldn't be able to say that—and it's important to me, so in that sense, I think I will always be religious. But maybe I'm not religious in Hasidic [referring to earlier discussion] way, [since I'm] living a white secularized life in Helsinki.

In this and the following description of their own religiosity they emphasise the self-determination of religious identity echoing principles of the lived religion approach in how they personally understand what constitutes being religious. They also through their ties to two different religious communities exemplify McGuire's argument that a person can hold multiple religious identities. This in addition to the knowing inclusion of religious nones indicate that TFF's self-understanding of interfaith dialogue is not build on traditional ideas of what constitutes religiosity but places emphasis on self-determination and -exploration of identity.

Such a focus on self-determination can be argued to cover a wider array of possible identities that the participants can draw on in their participation in the dialogue, such as cultural ones interviewee 3 references earlier.[90] In addition, the way they emphasise identity exploration allows for the possibility for people to participate even if they are not yet certain about their identity (or identities) echoing recommendations made Shoemaker and Edmonds on the inclusion of religious nones in interfaith dialogue. These factors seem to enable TFF's involvement of religious nones and helps them avoid the interfaith identity paradigm also described by Shoemaker and Edmonds, that they argue causes issues for non-religious participants, because the participants are expected to identify and participate in the dialogue through traditionally defined forms of religious identity.

However, these explorations of identity in TFF's work are not limited to the active members of TFF. In fact, another way in which identity exploration is discussed focuses on how TFF attempts to support these processes in the participants. Interviewee 2 here describes

[89] A Jewish religious group.

[90] Such a positioning of course also relates to the debate on the relationship between religion and culture in general that was mentioned earlier, however interviewee 3 seems to see the two as separate while considering both as suitable basis for engaging in the dialogue.

this goal from the point of view of their minority identity, but the core message is echoed by most of the interviewers:

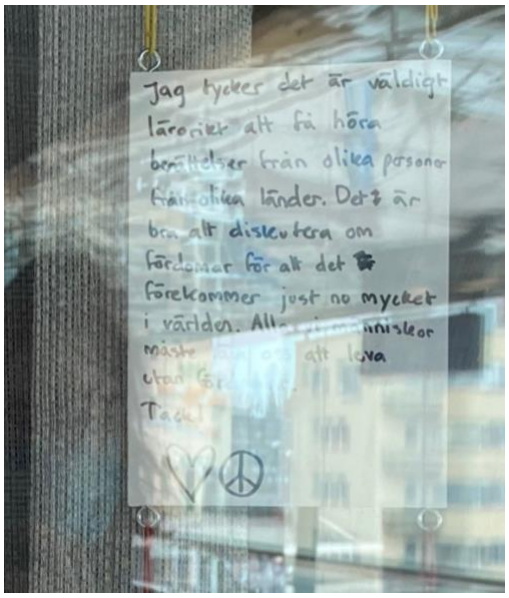
> Well, there it [interfaith dialogue] means for me at least, like as a religious minority, and as a person who belongs to like different minorities it just, if it's about like seeing, trying to see people that need to be seen like in a way that maybe other people cannot or—also to just give them tools or, or kind of ways of strengthening their own identities and to be proud of who they are and to also just create this like opportunity that they feel like when they're getting stronger in their own self and their own identities and about who they are. Then they might also start reaching out more to other people and in that way create like stronger communities between each other also.

Central to this goal is to both giving the participants a place in which to reflect on their own identity and empowering them to share this and their stories with others. Interviewees describe how such empowerment can take place through seeing a person of the same minority take the space in the classroom setting or by having discussions on privilege and discrimination. Interviewee 4 gives a rather beautiful description of one such occasion where a participant in the workshop was empowered to share their experience of discrimination:

> But it was beautiful to see how she took this space and she wanted to share. And all of these small things that happen. But they are so empowering and so strong that it's really rewarding because then afterwards you walk out and then you have so much faith and hope for what you can do with people.

It is important to note that the youth as a target group is especially significant here, as youth is the period in which identities are explored and solidified. As such, facilitating the exploration of both minority and religious identities that are not so commonly discussed in these settings, can indeed provide an important and empowering foundation for these explorations.

This strengthening of identity and empowering the participants in sharing their stories, however, is only one way in which TFF engages with identity in order to reach their goal. Another is their focus on combating stereotypes and outgroup prejudice. This is also visible in the feedback from workshop participants chosen to be included in the exhibition. Many of them mention the importance of hearing and learning from different people, with the following touching directly on its relation to prejudice:



Part of image 4, translation from Swedish: 'I think it is very instructive to hear stories from different people from different countries. It is good to discuss about prejudices because there is just so much in the world. All of us humans must learn to live without prejudice.'

One important part of combating prejudice and stereotypes is for storytellers to talk about their faith or other relevant issues in their stories as individuals not as representatives of their (religious) group. Interviewee 1 describes the importance of this:

> One of the most important rules that we have, like we always try to talk about our faiths from the personal perspective, not about representing group perspectives so the participants are telling their own experience.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think it is particularly important that you represent your own perspective in particular?
>
> Because it's like, it's very big responsibility to talk about whole group. You cannot generalize, generalizing is something that makes the problems in these kinds of situations when it's about interfaith.

Interviewee 4 also talks about this problem of generalizing when they describe how only members of the majority can typically been seen as secular, whereas people from religious minority backgrounds are often defined by this despite their current religiosity. Interviewer 3 on the other hand makes this one of the most important lessons they hope to impart on the participants of the storytelling workshops – not to make assumptions about people based on stereotypes. They happily describe this goal of theirs and how it has been achieved in the workshops:

> Actually, some of them even give a feedback, like from now on if I look at a person, I will never generalize them, never, you know. I will not look at them and think about anything, so that was

> wonderful. So, the message really went through. Everybody has a story, so just don't look at a person and try to generalize everyone rather understand what is the story of the person.

Such focus on combating stereotypes and not being perceived only through group membership connects to depersonalisation process discussed earlier in relation to the self-categorization theory. It seems that TFF works to help participants view the storyteller as an individual rather than a stereotypical representation of a particular social identity group. One part of this is also recognizing that people can hold multiple social identities, a fact that Hogg points out as one aspect of social identity that can be used in peacebuilding through cross-categorization and one emphasised by McGuire also when it comes to religious identities. Such processes that humanize 'the other' have also been seen by Halafoff as well as Vishanoff as one of interfaith dialogue's way of contributing to peacebuilding. Interviewee 4 touches upon this process and many aspects of TFF engaging with identity in their work in their following explanation of the goal of the whole program:

> I think [the goal is] also like building a community of people who can support each other. And see each other with all the, maybe not with all because that's very hard, but with as many as possible layers of our different identities. Then striving for a more complex view of the world including faith, including religion, including all of these things that we usually—that we don't want to talk about or that we don't talk about, but that are still affecting us hugely.

In this section, the role of identities in TFF's work has been explored. The interviewees firstly recognize the role of social identities in both their work as individuals but also as important factors in the societal changes they wish to achieve. Secondly, it is viewed as central for TFF to support both the identity exploration off TFF actives and workshop participants. Here religious identities are viewed as self-determined and also non-religious identities are valued. And lastly, TFF's work also centers around social identities when they make efforts to knowingly combat stereotypes and outgroup prejudices. Naturally, this has connections to the social identity theory which can be observed to be a relevant perspective as interviewees have themselves brought up intergroup relationships and stereotypes. The next part on the other hand will build on this to explore dynamics typical of intergroup dialogue. In addition, it will look more deeply into how the interviewees themselves understand interfaith dialogue.

4.3. Bringing People Together

When discussing interfaith dialogue in the context of the work TFF does, one perception in particular came up repeatedly in the interviews: that of bringing people together. But to understand what this means in the context of TFF, how they conceptualize interfaith dialogue

must first be studied. Interestingly, when asked to define their understanding of interfaith dialogue, several of the interviewees revert to traditional ideas, echoing Smock, of highly engaged and knowledgeable individuals discussing their respective religions and traditions, like interviewee 2 does here:

> First, I think of this quite naive situation where there's like one room and there's a lot of like very different people like, there is one Muslim and there is like—or what I actually think about first, if I think like in a stereotypic way is maybe like some people that are very much like engaged in their religious community. So, for example, a rabbi, or, you know an imam, like people who are very you know all about kind of the religion and not people who are, like sometimes go to church. Like people who are actually into it and then they can talk to each other about their traditions and like create some kind of a collaboration together peacefully.

This goes to show how deeply ingrained such a traditional understanding of interfaith dialogue is even among youth active in the field. Of course, when talking about interfaith dialogue in the context of TFF the focus shifts to one more in line with Bernstein's interreligious dialogue: building connections in order to improve intercommunal relationships and work toward social change. This is also referred to by interviewee 5, who views interfaith dialogue as something through which understanding and respect for those different from oneself can be achieved. They relate the need for this to the increasing diversity in societies as a result of globalization:

> Living in a, in a society that's so, I mean we're only getting more or like—well, not now because we're in middle of Pandemic—but otherwise we would be very globalized. And I mean refugees are surging and people are moving and there's a lot of different reasons why people are coming together under different circumstances. And I think coming together voluntarily is just a great—well it's really important to sort of build this understanding and build this respect that I already said and trying to like understand from each other and learn from each other and why it's so important that society needs to accept everyone, so we're able to live here together.

Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, whose definition of interfaith dialogue was earlier discussed in relation to the concrete way in which TFF works, view this learning from the other Interviewee 5 mentions along with gaining sufficient factual information as an important part storytelling as a form of interfaith dialogue. Interviewee 6 for their part captures this aspect as well when they describe interfaith dialogue as 'sharing and connecting' and interviewee 2 indeed brings up youth learning basic information about religious communities as one of the most important objectives of telling their story. Many of the interviewees also point to lack of awareness and talk about religion and faith as one of the reasons they encounter negative reactions when talking about their work. Even in a feedback from who appears to be one of teachers of a class TFF visited they say that the experience has reminded them of how important it is 'for the youth to get the chance to share experiences and thoughts about

religious and cultural identity.'[91] When discussing the role of interfaith dialogue in the work of TFF, interviewee 5 offers an explanation that captures this aspect:

> Creating this space where minority religions and different religions get to sort of share and get to come together and they're sort of granted space and there is space for other religions to also have a voice. I think it's really important and not something that's very common. And also faith and religion has become sort of taboo, I think, during past years and still creating a space for faith to still, I don't know, exist and for youth to be able to express their faith, I think it's really important.

Clearly just having a space for these conversations to be had is seen as quite rare, especially for the youth, but something that is sorely needed. In addition to interviewee 5, interviewee 4 also takes this deliberation further by reflecting on why interfaith dialogue in general is needed. Interviewee 4 reflects on this necessity and dives into the question of what religion is in their definition of interfaith dialogue:

> Well, I think interfaith dialogue is inevitable. Religion has always been with us. And it's going to continue being with us because religion isn't—to me it's an expression of —I'm a believer so I believe in God and we as a group we also, as a people, we seek to express how we see the world and how we're related, and to make some sort of sense of everything that is around us that is vast and huge. And in order to be a community and be a society, we need to have —we need to share some sort of ideas and, and points of reference … So starting from there that I don't think that we can be without religion. Then going from there, we will always have different ways of seeing the world. There will never be, hopefully, I hope very much that there will never be just one way and that we see the world because that would be a disaster. So, and then if we have many different ways we need to communicate. And that's the beauty. That's when we learn, because if we don't share and rethink and think. We're stuck. We're stuck, we don't live. If we don't live there is no life. Life is about dialogue.

They view religion as a way of making sense of or relating to the world as well as a tradition or culture that connects people. In this way religion becomes a somewhat necessary part of the human experience, which is why they argue that religion will always remain relevant. This sort of conceptualisation also relates to why religions are important in peacebuilding, not only because people from different religious backgrounds need to communicate, but also because it defines the worldview and possibly also motivations of people engaging in peacebuilding or dialogue as posited by the concept of religious peacebuilding.

As discussed earlier, another part of the human experience according to theorists of social identity is our tendency to categorize ourselves and others and view them through stereotypical ideas and attributes associated to the outgroup. However, when discussing the food sharing events, interviewee 3 offers beautiful insight into how such form of interfaith dialogue can be used to combat this through humanization and personal connections, a view again similar to Bernstein's:

[91] Exhibition, image 2.

> I mean there is no human being who doesn't have a bias, but the difference is that whether we are able to find our human connection. Sometimes sharing food does trigger the conversation. It does trigger—like, you cannot really hate the person and share a meal with them, it's not that easy. So, when you get exposed to another culture, their cultural elements, folktale, their food, you tend to be less prejudice towards them.

If, based on this, interfaith dialogue is seen as an important way of bringing people together to break boundaries and prejudice as well as to learn more about one another and their beliefs, it is also necessary to look at what is needed for a successful interfaith dialogue. One thing according to the interviewees is that people need to learn how to communicate. Interviewee 3 speaks about the reciprocity of dialogue and the state of mind people bring to the dialogue:

> So, in interfaith dialogue, the first thing we try to teach people or—yeah teach will be the right word—to make people understand is that you don't have to be agitated or threatened just to listen to someone, you understand, so you don't have to agree to them, but you just let them speak and you let them finish and then you have the chance to also speak. You know, like one of the main problems we have in our society [is] that we're not really good at listening to others. So, people oftentimes feel left out, they feel left out and the dialogue part itself actually let[s] people have the comfortable position to talk.

They emphasise, echoing Swindler, that all parties listening to one another takes precedence over reaching an agreement on something. Interviewee 5 for their part also stresses reciprocity in the dialogue, making the all-important point that the purpose of a dialogue is not in trying to convert the other to your point of view - or religion for that matter as agreed by majority of scholars on interfaith dialogue. In fact, they also, as do most of the interviewees, talk about the need to find a common ground and sense of togetherness:

> Well, I think it correlates with what I've said already about how it is like sharing experiences and talking about different sort of, where you come from and how to create this mutual understanding of people from different places with different values, even different beliefs. Where they can find this sort of common denominator between themselves and I think that's like important the coming together of it all, because it's a dialogue, so it's not supposed to be a monologue from one person only trying to implement their beliefs and stories on another.

Of Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty's definitions, here affective dialogue seems more applicable as it is described as something that can lead to 'finding the other in themselves', which could be applicable to this sort of finding of commonalities and shared humanity. In addition, this could also be seen as a cross-categorization process as described by Hogg. In both cases, the argument can be made that this hold for building better intergroup relations.

Another aspect of the importance of proper communication in interfaith dialogue is that of knowing how to do it safely. As mentioned earlier, TFF employs safe space construction in their workshops, which in their case refers to ground rules drafted together with the

participants on how to have a respectful and effective dialogue. Interviewee 2 explains how they view safe space:

> I don't think that it's possible to build like a complete safe space. But at least to like introduce the methods in which you like—in this way you can like include others and make sure that there is like also space for discussing, for example your own faith in schools, which I know that for me also has been quite hard to do.

They astutely point out that one of the facets of safe space is that it can enable the discussion of topics that are otherwise viewed as difficult to approach. Interestingly, for example Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty see interfaith dialogue based in storytelling in itself as something that can allow dealing with difficult topics. Interviewee 6 takes this view further and views interfaith dialogue in general as a 'safe space for asking and answering uncomfortable questions.' Interviewee 3 echoes similar sentiment in equating dialogue with safe space and reflects her own experience with this connection:

> So instead of like feeling that threat, why am I feeling accepted is because I'm able to speak there. Nobody is shutting me down. You see that is the beauty of it. So, dialogue basically means a safe space, safe space means you are creating a space [where] person is not feeling threatened to present his or her idea, that you don't have to believe in, you don't have to agree to, but you can still be a good listener.

However, as discussed in relation to identity in the previous part, the youth taking part in these workshops are often still engaging in self-reflection, which is also an important part of successfully engaging in intergroup or interfaith dialogue. Interviewee 2 points to this clearly:

> I really think that if you like want to create a dialogue with another person and start to like understand other people, you need to work on yourself too and understand who you are like —otherwise, it's going to be much harder.

Since TFF, as seen before, aims to support this process it is natural that the majority of the interviewees view the fact that they work with young people in particular as very important. Disconfirming evidence is presented here by interviewee 6 who, while not dismissing the importance of engaging the youth, points out that it is very relevant to get older generations involved in interfaith dialogue as well. But in general, several of the interviewees point out that, as observed earlier, since the youth are still working on this process of self-reflection, they are more open to hearing different views. This idea was also echoed by Talcott in her emphasis on the importance of youth engagement in interfaith dialogue due to their open-heartedness and curiosity. Interviewee 3 elaborates on this:

> we are targeting very, very young people who are still open to hear and easy to communicate to [than] comparatively much older generations, for example. So since the youth is the future, these people will grow up and they will make a society that is more accessible for everybody.

Interviewee 3 also points to a sort of generational divide, where the youth of today are more aware of what is going on in the world and what the significance of global cooperation is, which can only be built through good relationships between peoples and nations:

> We have different generations exposed to different kinds of possibilities, right? Youth who are very young at this time are also not out of touch with what is going on in the world. They're very much aware that yes, we have advancement in, for example, space exploration and you just name it, like we're coming with different tools and, and the youth are also able to fathom the idea of what happens if we don't have collaboration with each other…. I understand that without peace we cannot really advance in science. We cannot really solve our world problems. We just will have more and more war, more and more bloodshed. So far easier to talk to youth because they are aware of the reality and far more connected than the previous generation.

They make the argument that globalisation has actually made the youth more aware of the need to build and maintain peace for the benefit of all. It is interesting to note, that in general, the format of bringing people together the interviewees have discussed seems to focus on the type of 'living dialogue' – breaking of prejudices and forming intercommunal relationships – described by Cornelio and Saliera in their study of young interfaith actives in the Philippines. Perhaps this is partly explained by the youth not having such a ready access to the high-level theological dialogues, but it also seems significant that the youth are more aware and wish to affect change in their surroundings, something that is discussed more in the next part of this analysis, which then steers them towards the grassroots level of interfaith dialogue in their communities.

One of the central ways in which the interviewees have described TFF's work is that of bringing people together, which can be observed to reflect theoretical models of interfaith dialogue discussed earlier through its focus on the aspect of passing on knowledge and affecting change through the relationships. The interviewees also viewed interfaith dialogue as something vital to facilitate coexistence and respect in our diverse society. However, to make this dialogue effective, it needs to be reciprocal and safe, and the participants need to have reflected or be willing to reflect on their own identities as well. But importantly youth are both the target and facilitators of this dialogue, because they are perceived as more gobally aware than older generations, open to new points of view and wanting to affect change in their surroundings. The basis on which this desired change and TFF's work are interpreted as peacebuilding, along with the practicalities and goals of them, will be discussed in the next section.

4.4. Building Peace

Peace and peacebuilding activities form that last major point of discussion in the interviews. Interviewee 6 in fact says that TFF describes their work as 'building a safer Finland', which draws attention immediately to peacebuilding. However, to understand what peacebuilding means for TFF actives, it is important to explore how they understand peace. Several of the interviewees conceptualize peace around the terms of Galtung's negative peace: interviewee 6 for example refers to peace as confidence in continued safety and security whereas interviewee 5 describes it as the opposite of unrest and as calmness and stability.

However, in contrast to this traditional view of peace as the absence of different forms of violence, some interviewees focus more on coexistence. Interviewee 1 frames this in the context of acceptance for differences:

> let's talk about Finland and what peace is here, it's —people are different—and it's just like we accept each other like in the most welcoming way.

Interviewee 3 follows a similar framing and makes further reference to lack of discrimination, moving closer to the concept of positive peace:

> Peace means regardless of the differences we have, we can coexist. So I think what I understand from peace is that people of all the background, regardless what background they are from, they can live fearlessly in a society.

This kind of view is closely associated with the goal of interfaith dialogue in bringing people together that was discussed in the previous part. Interviewee 5 insightfully explains this connection between self-reflection related to storytelling, bringing people together and coexistence:

> Well, we focus a lot on storytelling as a method, of course, and just for the youths to sort of create their own stories. And by creating their own stories, sort of learning to also how to maybe pick up on other people's stories as well and, and how to find commonalities between different stories and sort of focus on what's mutual instead of focusing on what's different. And I think that's also really important to sort of recognize things that you are familiar with in other people's stories. To create more of a sort of understanding and a foundation of no —I say, I've been repeating respect a lot, like I think that's really foundational and important. Yeah, because it's all about coexistence really and we live in in this society which is getting more diverse by the minute even though powers are fighting against diversity by the minute. So, it's like this really sort of tug of war between how we can all exist here together because that's what we are here: together.

Such a combination can in fact also be found in how Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty's definition of the role of storytelling in interfaith dialogue. Like discussed in the previous part,

they emphasise both the exchange of information as well as the sharing of personal narratives. Storytelling especially is seen as a combination of these cognitive and affective forms of dialogue and according to them has the potential to facilitate finding common ground. Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty also argue that the personal nature of the narratives makes it especially effective and able to address even sensitive topics as is typical for TFF's work, a sentiment echoed by interviewee 1:

> [Talking about the benefits of the storytelling method] because this is very personal and if you reach people from the personal perspective - like this is real, this person, this, this story - and also because of this story and because [it's] about the personal information, I think that it's the most honest way and the most closest way to get others to understand.

Another point of view on the relation of TFF's work and peacebuilding is offered by interviewee 2, who in fact points out that they view peace as largely identical to interfaith dialogue: 'People maybe don't always agree with each other. But you have the tools and methods for handling these situations.' Here it is recognised that disagreements are bound to arise but that for maintaining peace it is vital to have the methods to deal with the disagreements peacefully. When talking about interfaith dialogue interviewee 2 elaborates:

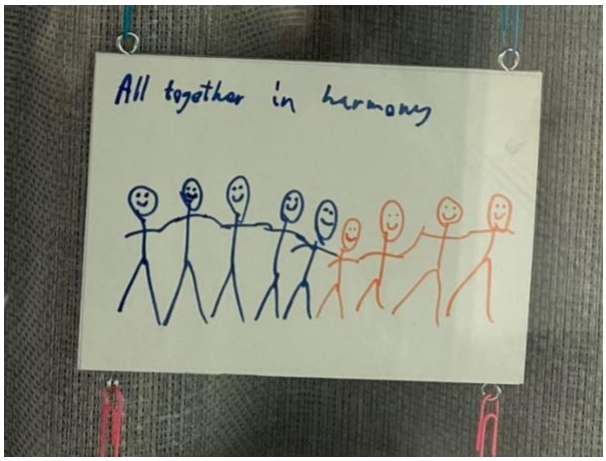
> For me personally dialogue is also about like, maybe there is some kind of a conflict, but you learn how to handle that conflict. Like, it's not about avoiding conflict, it's more about like facing it in a good way, like in a smart and calm way kind of. So maybe it could even create some gaps, but I guess that these gaps could be more kind of constructive, if it makes sense. Like for example if you have a family of different religions backgrounds, so when you create this interfaith dialogue they might start realizing some things - like if there's two people that have different religious backgrounds, then maybe they will start disagreeing with each other more the more dialogue they have, but at least they will kind of see if they will face a conflict. Because it would still be there regardless of whether they [are] talking about it or not. It's still going to be there, now they're just kind of facing it and trying to handle it somehow. So, I'm not sure if this is a gap or not, but I think it's more constructive and efficient that way. Yeah, you're kind of moving somewhere, you're making progress.

Again, the focus is on how to constructively approach conflict in order to facilitate a peaceful coexistence. However, here they also interestingly point out that such dialogue can in fact make people more aware of their differences. But they also argue that such awareness is important in order to address the underlying issues. It has already been noted previously that Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty's cognitive and affective interfaith dialogue are beneficial in their ability to address difficult questions through interpersonal narratives, and that Bernstein takes a similar view further by seeing people coming together to address possible social justice issues they have become aware of during the dialogue as an important result of engaging in these dialogues.

All in all, such approach to overcoming intergroup divides in their work is also very reminiscent of how Nagda and Maxwell perceive intergroup dialogue as learning endeavor that brings together people from different social identity groups and which aims to 'build relationships across cultural and power differences, to raise consciousness of inequalities, to explore the similarities and differences in experiences across identity groups, and to strengthen individual and collective capacities to promote social justice.' When looking back at different focuses TFF has, it can easily be argued that all the parts of this definition are met, the capacity building lastly coming into play with the latest expansion of TFF's work into study groups on social issues and joint action. In addition to these study groups, interviewee 4 when discussing goals of TFF also explains how social justice can also be promoted through dialogue:

> The more complexity [probe reveals that the interviewee is referring to diversity] you have, also I think the easier it becomes to breathe. Yeah, I think it helps. So the, the more complexly you're able to read things and experience them, the freer you are. So, to give freedom and complexity and tools to meet each other and be with each other. Yeah. So, the ultimate goal would be to create more understanding, of course, openness, fairness, in the society that we're living in, and less struggle and less pain.

It can be noted that the interfaith dialogue method of TFF also closely aligns with Nagda and Maxwell's own critical-dialogic approach to intergroup dialogue. Firstly, it indeed addresses intergroup tensions stemming from difference, misconceptions, social identity and social inequalities. And it does so both through building self-other relationships through storytelling and interactions – the dialogic part – as well as through addressing power dynamics which is the critical part. It is also compiled of the same two stages: the sharing and engaging with narratives, which in TFF's case indeed often centre around privilege and discrimination and fostering the resulting awareness of inequalities into social action. In the following picture, a participant of the workshop touches upon these topics by calling for different people to live in harmony:



Part of exhibition image 3

In fact, the critical part is also echoed throughout the interviews as many of the interviewees also talk about the importance of raising awareness of discrimination and oppressive social structures, for example. Interviewee 2 themselves describes TFF's work in the following way:

> Well, I would say that it's a youth project first of all and we do interfaith dialogue. And then we do antiracism and we challenge social norms I would say, and then we work with young people. That's what we do. And then the storytelling, I really like it because it brings art together with this social criticism.

Here it is already established that TFF's work has a strong focus on creating a more inclusive society. Interviewee 4 clearly establishes the connection between social justice work and peacebuilding, echoing perhaps an understanding of structural and cultural forms of violence and positive peace:

> Peace arises with equality. When you have an unjust and unfair system, you will not have peace.

With social justice and peacebuilding, the connection to peace education also becomes apparent. A correlation to Smith's definition of peace education as 'educational strategies aimed at transforming societal divisions and conflict into peaceful and sustainable relationships' can be seen also in how Interviewee 1 describes the goal of the TFF program:

> When there is no interfaith dialogue there will be also like racism and it's, one of the goals is to - I can see there will be less racism and more understanding, more understanding about other's culture and other's beliefs and also the mutual respect will be more. And one of the most important thing for me is the goal will be - is to have more people from the majority to acknowledge interfaith dialogue and see it because mostly it's - if you have the privilege you don't see it. So, it's, from my perspective, it's one important goal that it's not only the minorities that they are struggling trying to make all these interfaith activities but also the active majority.

Another important point they bring out here is the necessity of engaging also with the majority. Interviewee 2 also references the importance of the majority engagement in emphasising how important it is for institutions also to pick up on what TFF is trying to do in relation to the cooperation with the University of Helsinki. They also mention similar type of awareness raising when they directly bring up making the youth more aware of oppressive structures as one of their main goals in the storytelling exercises:

> Especially for kids, they just don't - like sometimes they might not pick up these like kind of systems and structures that are going on. And then like, if you don't talk about these things and if you don't see like what is actually going on, like there might be some kind of hierarchy.

The youth again are named as the key target group and it is recognized that they, especially those part of the majority, might not be aware of these oppressive structures, which is why they need to be discussed in order to create change. There was also a general consensus between the interviewees of the youth as the actors of future change. The youth were viewed as the generation that will grow up and create the change they wish to see in the society, which is one part of why they are the key target group of TFF as explained by Interviewee 5:

> The youth [are] a big part of the future of how our society will look like and that's why it's so important to involve younger individuals in this sort of peacebuilding work and equality building work because they are who will sort of bring this world into another place - and hopefully a better place - and that I think matters a lot. Yeah so, the youth are sort of - they have potential.

Here a direct correlation with the central idea of the UNSCR2250 can be observed: the youth are viewed not only as an important target group of peacebuilding efforts but as central actors in achieving the desired outcomes. Interviewee 4 directly points out that youth want to affect change in the world they live in, the possible reasons of which were discussed in the previous part:

> I think it's really important when you are young to get to change things and otherwise you will be become very - at least me personally, if I don't feel like I can contribute - I want to contribute to the world that I'm born into.

The fact that TFF is a youth-led program uniquely makes their work both aiming at empowering youth as peacebuilders and acting as young peacebuilders themselves. Significantly, the accounts of the interviewees in this study also seem to reflect those of the

young peacebuilders in Simpson's study who also see it important to address issues of inequality and social justice as well as to bridge gaps between groups of people.

In the end, taking a wider perspective into both the interviewees' understanding of peace and the work TFF does, it can be observed that it in fact closely aligns with the concept of positive peace. Through the social justice aspect of their work, they are working to build more equity and equality and to address structural and cultural forms of violence. And with the whole work centring around interfaith dialogue and with interviewees emphasising the need to find ways to communicate in order to peacefully coexist, the focus is clearly on facilitating a culture of peace and dialogue. Thus, it can be concluded that one of the main goals of TFF's work is indeed building positive peace in the society.

What can be learned from these four main categories arising from the interviewees' accounts is that TFF employs different methods of doing interfaith dialogue, storytelling being the most central, to engage with identity in order to both support identity exploration and to combat stereotyping and prejudice. This in turn works to meet the goals of bringing people together to facilitate better communication and coexistence. And lastly, the goal of this is to build more just and more peaceful society. Interviewee 3 summarises all of this, and the core of this analysis, in their explanation of why they are involved with TFF:

> If only I was exposed to tolerance in a very young age. All these prejudices I held against other people wouldn't be there. And then I felt - imagine all those people who still have these prejudices because they were never exposed to the other side, you know. So, then I felt like, what can I do? I cannot change the world within one night, but what I can do, I can be useful, and be[ing] a part of TFF gives me this opportunity to actually work together with similar-minded people and try our best from our position, as I said to try, making people like understand why dialogue is important to bring peace in the society.

5. Conclusions

This study set out the explore the connections between interfaith dialogue and a wider understanding of peace and peacebuilding based on Galtung's concept of positive peace. It did so by focusing on a youth-led interfaith program Together for Finland and by answering the question of how TFF, and the active youth who plan and execute its work, understand and utilize interfaith dialogue and what kind of goals they are trying to reach through it. Since identities and intergroup relations are a central way through which TFF engages in these issues, the connections between intergroup, interfaith dialogue and social identity were explored, along with the particular question of the role of participants identifying as non-religious in interfaith dialogue that became relevant through the data gathered. But importantly, this study also sought a better understanding of how youth in particular engage with interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding, so this aspect of TFF's work and the interviewee's accounts was also explored.

The previous analysis chapter presented the four main perspectives that came up in the interviews: the concrete work of TFF and it's specialities, the role of identity in their work, the focus on bringing people together, and lastly the relation of their work to building peace. These are also the main perspectives through which the interviewees, and through them TFF, construct both their understanding of interfaith dialogue and their work. For example, methodologically their work in most areas builds on storytelling, through which they often initiate and engage in dialogue. The purpose of the stories is most often to share an experience, through which the participants both learn about, for instance, the religion of the storyteller or social justice issues they face. The listeners are called to, through empathetic listening, to relate to the experience of the storyteller, engage in self-reflection and dialogue and to eventually be motivated to work towards a safer and more inclusive society.

It is important to note that such an approach rather closely reflects many of the existing theories on interfaith and intergroup dialogue. For example, both Swindler as well as Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty in their theories place emphasis on sharing and empathetic listening as a way of relating to the reality of the other. This includes both learning about the other's religion or social identity group, what Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty call cognitive dialogue as well as what they would call affective dialogue – meaning personal reflection and 'finding the other in themselves.' The interviewees also repeat their observation that interfaith dialogue in a storytelling format based on personal narratives allows for addressing even sensitive topics. In this way it can be argued that the analysis of the work TFF does supports this kind of model for interfaith dialogue.

However, TFF takes their work further and aim for the dialogue to have positive societal consequences as well. In this they reflect more closely Bernstein's definition, which is in a way natural, since her definition addresses grassroots level interfaith dialogue in particular. She sees interfaith dialogue as building intergroup relationships to improve group relations and sees joint work towards social change and justice as a natural next step. This view is also expressed throughout the interviews when the goal of the program is defined in different ways as building more understanding and better communication between groups of people and lessening prejudices. It can be argued that this is also reflected in TFF's latest focus on antiracism.

Another theoretical framework that the work of TFF closely aligns to is Nagda and Maxwell's dialogic-critical approach to intergroup dialogue. The theory reflects similar two facets of curating meaningful intergroup relationships (dialogic part) and harnessing the resulting increased awareness of different circumstances into social action (critical part). This connection is hardly surprising, since it was already concluded earlier that interfaith dialogue, in cases like TFF, is in fact a specialised form of intergroup dialogue. It was also observed earlier, how the dialogic-critical approach bears a close resemblance to Abu-nimer, Khoury and Welty's, and especially Bernstein's definitions of interfaith dialogue.

Such theoretical connections give insight into how TFF understands interfaith dialogue in their work. When the interviewees define interfaith dialogue in more detail, the main emphasis they bring out is that of bringing people together. Interfaith dialogue is indeed seen as learning from one another, reflecting on what has been learned and how that possibly makes one want to affect change in their communities. In addition, it is also seen as an integral way to build trust and respect as well as to lessen prejudices between groups of people.

Such efforts to improve intergroup relationships are approached by TFF actives through reflections on identity in general. They not only place great emphasis on supporting the identity explorations of the participants and actives, but also directly describe how they knowingly through the stories told seek to make the participants see the storyteller as an individual rather than a stereotypical representation of an outgroup. This kind of approach seeks to combat the depersonalisation described by the self-categorization theory and to humanize the other. It is important to note that most theories, when discussing the potential of interfaith dialogue in peacebuilding refer to this kind of humanization of the other through the dialogue as the key asset.

This focus on identity is closely related to the perhaps the most significant theoretical underpinning of this study, which is its utilization of the Social Identity Theory in analysing the role of identity and intergroup relations in the work of TFF. The interviewees themselves to a surprising degree relied on related concepts, whether it was to talk about the importance of their own social identities in their work or how they perceived the goals of the program in terms of building better intergroup relations.

The dialogue TFF builds is in fact largely based on stories that touch upon different aspects of the storyteller's identity: the stories mostly concern religion, personal faith or social identity questions related to religion or minority position. However, what sets TFF apart from the majority of interfaith dialogue programs is that they actively engage and involve people who do not identify as religious as well. This is an interesting aspect that only came up during the interview process but presents an opportunity to study this issue that has mostly been ignored by researchers. In the wider field of interfaith dialogue programs it appears that efforts are being made to include the growing number of religious nones in interfaith dialogue, but such efforts have often been somewhat unsuccessful in more traditional forms of interfaith dialogue as described by Shoemaker and Edmonds.

For TFF, it seems that this inclusion has happened rather organically, both since the workshops often target a group of youth at once without specific beforehand knowledge about the religiosity of the participants and since there are several non-religious actives who are a part of the core group that takes part and plans TFF's activities. It could be argued that the successful inclusion of the religious nones in TFF hinges on three factors. Firstly, the storytelling format of their work is focused on individual narratives, through which it is possible to explore more nuances of experiences with religion, than if the work followed the interfaith identity paradigm where participants are often asked to simply label themselves as a part of a certain group.

Secondly, this format where individuals draft the stories they wish to share means they rely on their self-determination of their identity, religious and otherwise. This is closely associated with lived religion -approach, meaning that in some cases this was helpful in understanding the religiosity of the participants, since it gives a broader perspective on what religiosity is. However, since there are still cases where the interviewees self-define themselves as non-religious, this approach is insufficient to explain how TFF engages with religious identity. The social identity theory seems more applicable in these cases, since in these instances, the interviewees tend to focus more on group divisions and lessening prejudice between people. They might still view the religious affiliation of their family or

their own previous religiosity as a significant reflection point through which to examine intergroup relations and dialogue.

In general, questions of identity are viewed by the interviewees as central to the work TFF does. Which is why the third aspect that could help in the inclusion of religious nones is the view of TFF as a place where both the actives and the workshop participants may explore and reflect on their identities. TFF recognises that there are few opportunities for youth to truly think about and discuss questions of faith and religious identity. Hence, they wish to provide this space and opportunity for the youth and don't expect them to have a ready understanding of their religious identity to engage in the workshops.

In the end, while social identity theory is not often used to focus on religious identity, let alone interfaith dialogue, in the light of this study it proves to be a rather apt framework to study how the participants position themselves in the dialogue. For the purposes of this study, it is to a degree more flexible than the lived religion perspective, as that, even though placing emphasis on self-definitions of religiosity, presupposes some form of religiosity while not all participants in TFF's form of dialogue identify as religious. The social identity theory on the other hand allows for a wider variety of social identities, such as ethnicity or previous religious identification or non-religiosity as itself, to function as the basis through which the participants engage in the dialogue.

Of course, the relevance of these aspects to the inclusion of religious nones is an interpretation based on the data, that did not originally seek to answer this question. However, it is clear based on the data that the participation of the religious nones in TFF is seen as significant and valuable, in part because it is seen as enriching the discussions and in part because the focus of TFF's work on building positive peace through bringing people together, which makes it important to reach people from all social identity groups. In the end, I would argue that more research specifically into the inclusion of religious nones would be beneficial, especially in studying how interfaith dialogue can be used to build peace.

As for how TFF themselves see how their work relates to peacebuilding, the answer relates to their understanding of peace as well as the goals they set for their work. While some interviewees conceptualize peace more traditionally as security and stability, most of them also bring out concepts like coexistence, respect and equality. I would argue that such accounts reflect a wider understanding of peace that closely reflects Galtung's concepts of positive peace and different forms of violence. It is important to note that this in context where there is no violent conflict can act as a guide to identifying key areas to focus on to build and maintain peace.

TFF does not implicitly refer to themselves as a peacebuilding program, although the slogan 'building a safer Finland' does somewhat point to that direction. Nor do the interviewees directly refer to it as such. However, when viewed through the perspective of positive peace, it becomes clear that the goals TFF works towards are indeed closely related to peacebuilding. Of course, the aforementioned goals of combating prejudice and creating better intergroup relations have direct implications for the overall security and social cohesion in societies, when the risk of intergroup conflict and violence based on prejudices and intergroup animosity is lessened.

But it is also worth noting that, as observed earlier, they also aim to address social justice issues. The aim of motivating the participants through the gaining new perspectives to engage with these issues, along with the antiracism work in general, address the underlying issues such as structural and cultural violence, and thus can be seen as building peace. And since a lot of this is done through educational settings such as workshops in schools or study circles, it is possible to categorize the work, not only as interfaith dialogue, but also as peace education. This is especially true for critical peace education that has similar aims of addressing social justice issues, and most closely links their work to generally recognized forms of peacebuilding.

In conclusion, many of the prevalent theories on interfaith and intergroup dialogue and their relation to peacebuilding are congruent with the work TFF does. The relevant theories on interfaith and intergroup dialogue are closely linked and thus in many places are applicable for similar reasons. Similar phases of learning, building of relationships and resulting social action are at least partly present in all of them. In addition, the social justice perspective also ties them to other concepts such as peace education. This side of TFF's work, along with its focus on intergroup relations and view of religion as a positive resource for peacebuilding link it to the theoretical foundation based on concepts of positive peace and religious peacebuilding.

However, it must be stated that beyond motivations of individual actives and a general understanding of religion as something that can contribute to peacebuilding, the literature on religious peacebuilding does not prove to be best suited for TFF's work. This in my view is due to two reasons: firstly, not all participants in the dialogue have religious motivations, and secondly, the activities are built on storytelling and don't involve practical demonstrations of religiosity such as joint prayer or attending the services of different religious groups.

In the end however, one of the main motivations of this study– and I would argue its contributions – is its focus on a youth to youth form of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding.

The actives who construct and execute the program are youth and that fact by nature also has some bearing on how they do this. It is visible in their motivation, which reflect for example realities of growin up in a more globalized and connected world. This is visible in an increased awareness of the need for coexistence and cooperation, and seeing the value in forming connections across group boundaries.

Many of them also describe how the motivation that drives them is the need to have an impact, to take part in shaping the society they live in in the direction they see best. They are aware of social justice issues, whether by first hand experiences of discrimination or through wider social movements that call attention to these, and this appears to be one of the key motivators for their work. And by engaging with these issues in such a way they are exemplifying UNSCR 2250's point that youth are both motivated to take part and already engaging in peacebuilding practices.

But the fact that the youth are also the target group has a significant impact on the activities as well. It is evident in the way that identity exploration is central to their work, recognizing the fact that many young people are still in the middle of the process of exploring their identity. This of course is applicable to both participants and actives. The interviewees point out that for similar reasons youth are often more open-minded and receptive to learning and engaging with these questions than older generations. This coupled with the fact that they are recognized as the key demographic to facilitate future change makes them such an important target group.

While it has already been noted that previous studies on youth engagement in peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue are rather limited, it is interesting to note, that those included and the findings of this study show that in both cases the youth have rather similar views on these issues. Working on improving intergroup relations, the core of TFF's activities as well, in particular appears to be viewed as central in all cases. More research would be needed to tell if this is indeed a persistent trend and if it occurs for similar reasons throughout.

Another important target for future studies could be the impact of youth-leadership in these projects. It would be valuable to compare programs youth design and execute such as TFF to ones where they are simply taking part. At least the interviewees in this study view it as important for their work to be youth-led in order to be most effective and reflective of the youth that are the target.

All in all, this study found that TFF's understanding and the format of their activities closely relate to several prominent theories on interfaith and intergroup dialogue, and based on this and the theoretical underpinnings argues that interfaith dialogue can in fact be seen as

a form of intergroup dialogue. Furthermore, it claims that through the social justice aspect of the dialogue, there is a strong connection to Galtung's positive peace, and TFF can be seen as working towards the goal of positive peace especially on issues of structural and cultural violence. In this way, this study finds that interfaith dialogue in the format TFF conducts it is indeed a form of building positive peace that could be utilized more broadly to build peace and social cohesion in our societies.

And lastly, this study has knowingly focused on a youth-led project and youth actives to gain a better understanding of how the youth engage with these issues. The fact that both those planning and executing the work as well as the main target group are young people was observed to be a significant factor in the overall planning and format of TFF's work as well as in the understanding of the ways and motivation of the youth to engage in such format of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding.

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Appendices

Interview Protocol

- **Background info (age, background, etc)**
- **How long have you been involved with TFF?**
- **How would you describe TFF?**
- **What is the goal of the TFF program? Ideal impact?**
- **How do you work towards this goal?**
    - What tools/activities do you use to achieve this goal?
    - Why is TFF particularly effective in reaching this goal?
    - What is the role of interfaith dialogue in this? Religious identity?

- **How do you understand interfaith dialogue?**
    - How do you see the role of (religious) background/faith/gender in interfaith dialogue?
    - How does your community or other communities react/think about interfaith dialogue?
    - Do you think interfaith dialogue is useful in bridging the gap between different groups of people?

- **How do you understand peace?**
    - How do you see the role and value of youth in building peace?

- **What have you done with TFF?**
    - Have you been involved in the storytelling program?
        - If yes: What do you talk about? What do you hope the listeners will take a way from your story? Would you like to share your story?
        - If not: what activity have you seen as most important? Why?
        - Other valuable activities?
        - What are your trainings focused on?
- **Why are you involved with TFF?**
- **Do you have anything to add to what we have discussed?**

Exhibition Images

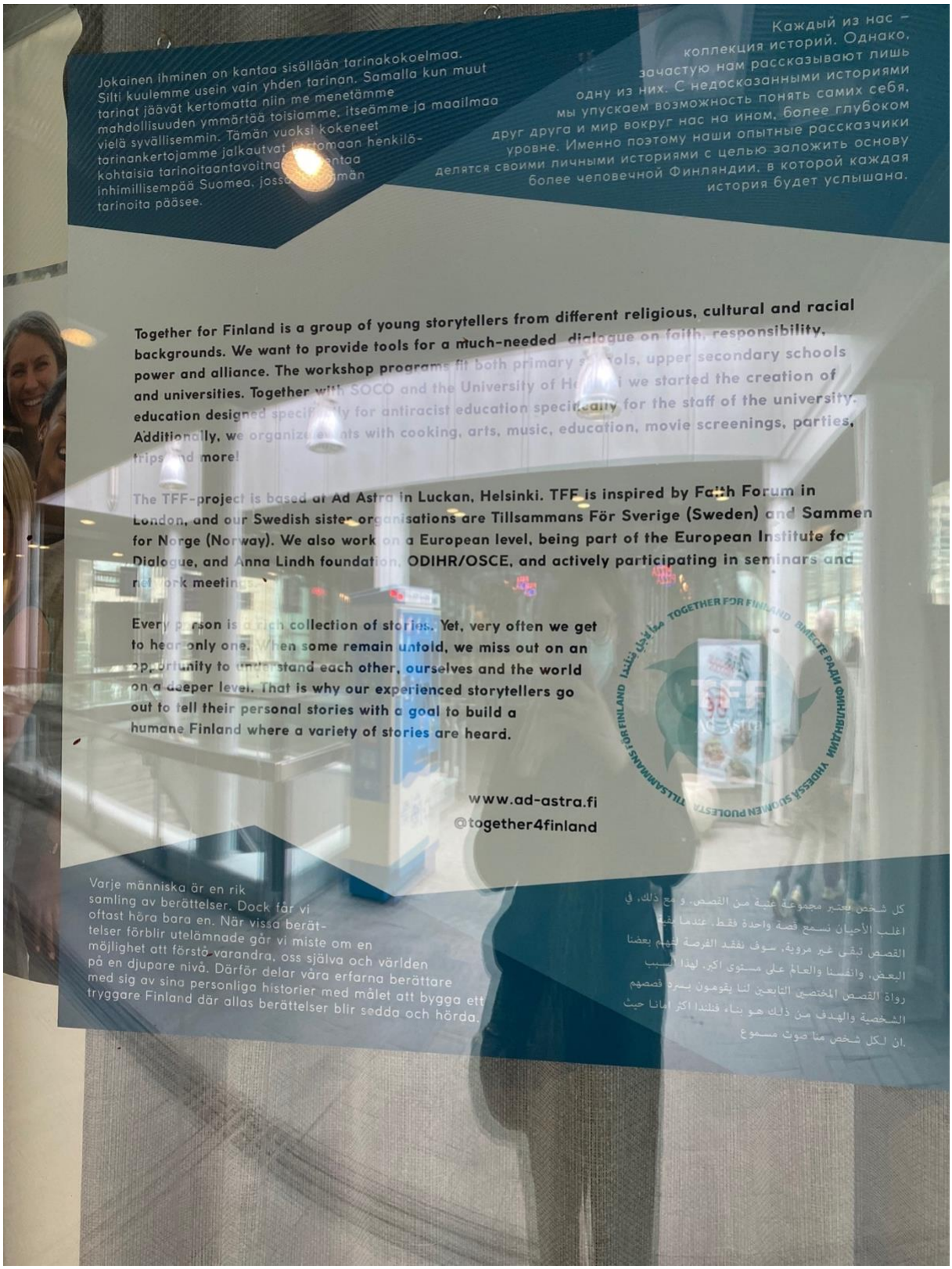

Image 1

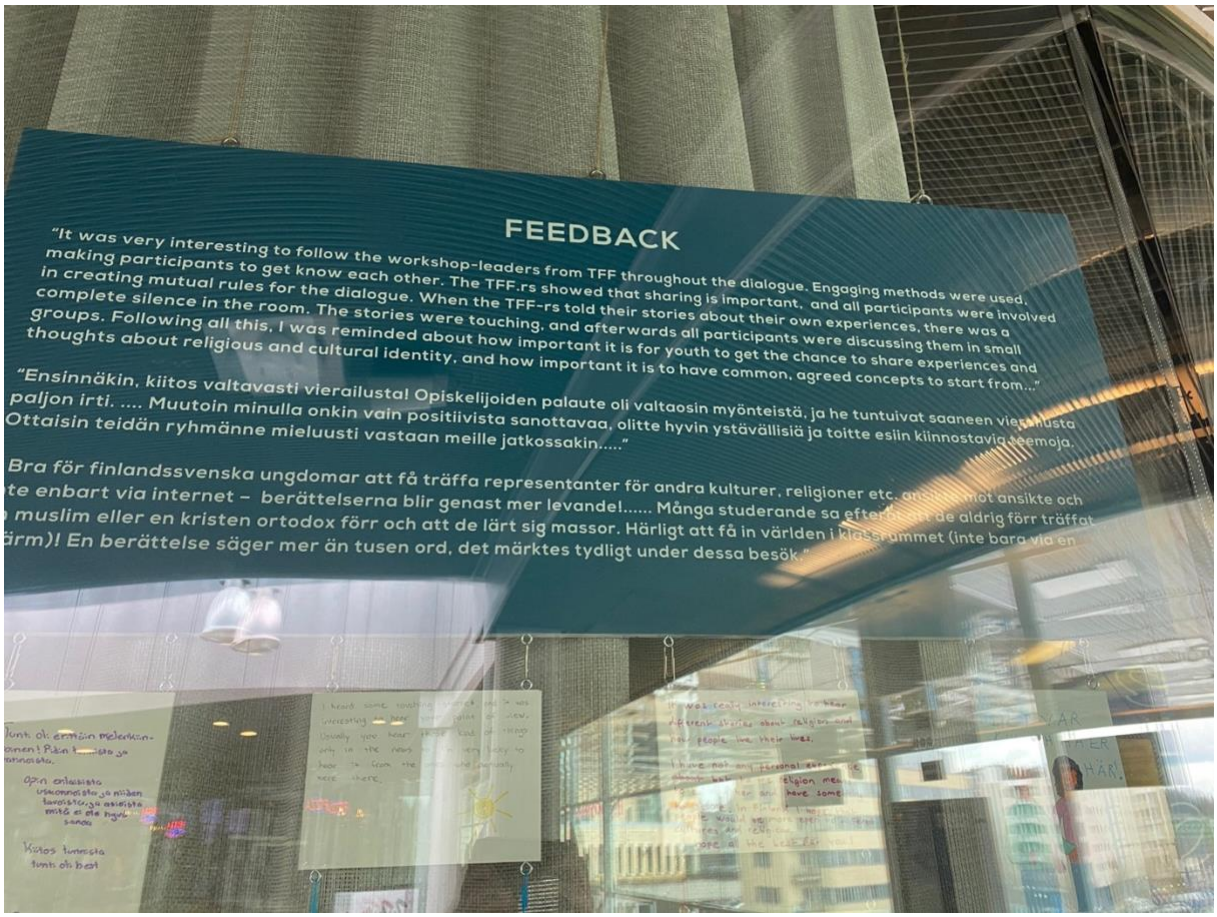
FEEDBACK
"It was very interesting to follow the workshop-leaders from TFF throughout the dialogue. Engaging methods were used, making participants to get know each other. The TFF.rs showed that sharing is important, and all participants were involved in creating mutual rules for the dialogue. When the TFF-rs told their stories about their own experiences, there was a complete silence in the room. The stories were touching, and afterwards all participants were discussing them in small groups. Following all this, I was reminded about how important it is for youth to get the chance to share experiences and thoughts about religious and cultural identity, and how important it is to have common, agreed concepts to start from..."
"Ensinnäkin, kiitos valtavasti vierailusta! Opiskelijoiden palaute oli valtaosin myönteistä, ja he tuntuivat saaneen vierailusta paljon irti. .... Muutoin minulla onkin vain positiivista sanottavaa, olitte hyvin ystävällisiä ja toitte esiin kiinnostavia teemoja. Ottaisin teidän ryhmänne mieluusti vastaan meille jatkossakin....."
Bra för finlandssvenska ungdomar att få träffa representanter för andra kulturer, religioner etc. och möt ansikte och
te enbart via internet – berättelserna blir genast mer levande!..... Många studerande sa efteråt att de aldrig förr träffat
muslim eller en kristen ortodox förr och att de lärt sig massor. Härligt att få in världen i klassrummet (inte bara via en
ärm)! En berättelse säger mer än tusen ord, det märktes tydligt under dessa besök."

Image 2

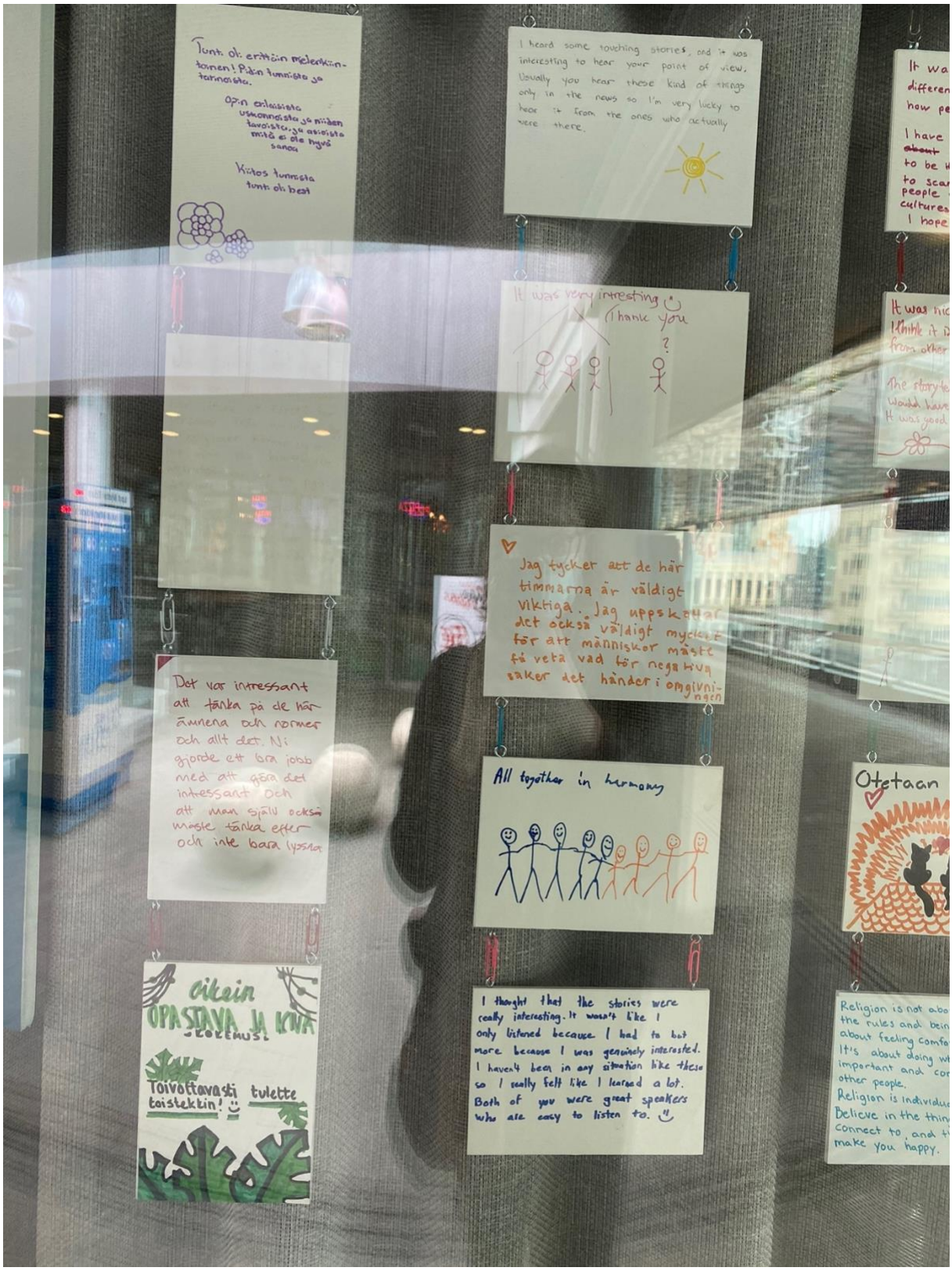
I heard some touching stories, and it was interesting to hear your point of view. Usually you hear these kind of things only in the news so I'm very lucky to hear it from the ones who actually were there.
It was very intresting
Thank you
Jag tycker att de här timmarna är väldigt viktiga. Jag uppskattar det också väldigt mycket för att människor måste få veta vad för negativa saker det händer i omgivningen
Det var intressant att tänka på de här ämnena och normer och allt det. Ni gjorde ett bra jobb med att göra det intressant. Och att man själv också måste tänka efter och inte bara lyssna
All together in harmony
Otetaan
Toivottavasti tulette toistekkin!
I thought that the stories were really interesting. It wasn't like I only listened because I had to but more because I was genuinely interested. I haven't been in any situation like these so I really felt like I learned a lot. Both of you were great speakers who are easy to listen to.
Religion is not abo
the rules and bein
about feeling comfo
It's about doing w
important and co
other people.
Religion is individua
Believe in the thin
connect to, and t
make you happy.

Image 3

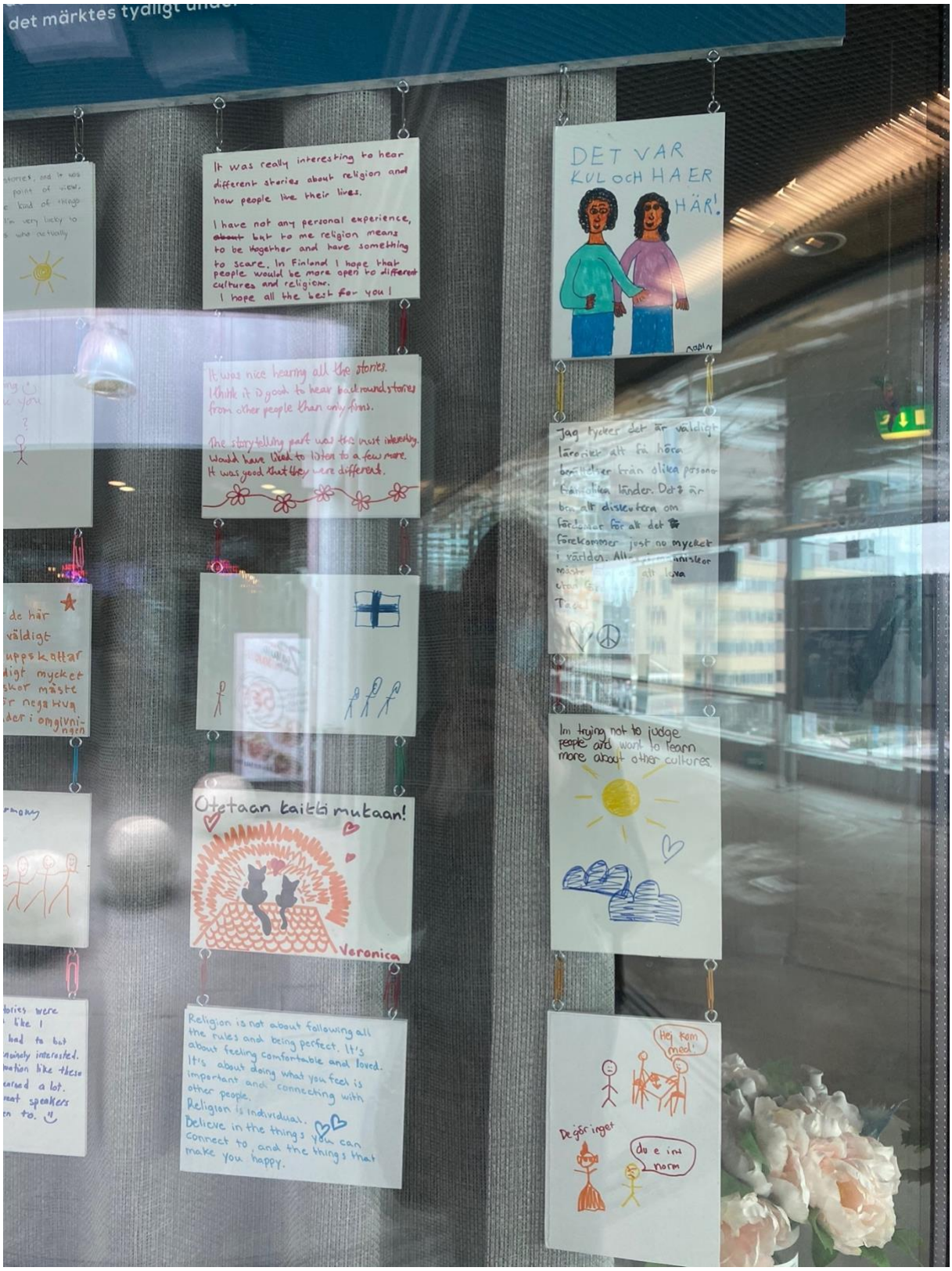
det märktes tydligt
It was really interesting to hear different stories about religion and how people live their lives.
I have not any personal experience, but to me religion means to be together and have something to scare. In Finland I hope that people would be more open to different cultures and religions.
I hope all the best for you!
DET VAR KUL OCH HA ER HÄR!
It was nice hearing all the stories.
I think it's good to hear background stories from other people than only from.
The storytelling part was the most interesting. Would have liked to listen to a few more.
It was good that they were different.
Jag tycker det är väldigt
Im trying not to judge people and want to learn more about other cultures
Otetaan kaikki mukaan!
Veronica
Religion is not about following all the rules and being perfect. It's about feeling comfortable and loved. It's about doing what you feel is important and connecting with other people.
Religion is individual.
Believe in the things you can connect to, and the things that make you happy.
Hej kom med!
De gör inget
du e int norm

Image 4


2016
We started to share stories in 10 different languages
Our member used storytelling to share experience about living as a Muslim woman in Finland at UNITED Conference Against Racism in Macedonia.
TFF spoke about working with children on inclusiveness through traditions and tales at a seminar in Brussels organized by the European Commission.
TFF was invited to present the project in one of the workshops on "Advancing social inclusion and social justice in education" at Conference for Nordic youths.
2015
After working with dialogue and storytelling since 2008 Ad Astra rf received a grant from the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland and started a cooperation with Fryshuset in Stockholm and their youth program Tillsammans för Sverige. During the summer of 2015 the first three people gathered together sharing common ideas on storytelling.
Already in September 2015 12 young people with different backgrounds met up in Helsinki with the teachers from Sweden and Together for Finland was born.
2018
TFF and Ad Astra me
Jewish-Muslim Conf
Security and Cooper
TFF introduced new
importance of interf
Assembly in Serbia.
Organized a crash-c
methods, human-rig
storytelling.
TFF members visite
experience with Sw
för Sverige.
6 people represented TFF and Finland at Nordic dialog meeting in Norway
TFF and Ad Astra participated at the Connecting Actions Symposium on interconvictional dialogue in Europe orga-nized in Paris, for supporting intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
TFF members visited 5 differ
in Finland, to
share knowledge.
of our you
represented TFF and sha
method at
TFF organized dis
of the exhibition Ju
Ad Astra in Annanta
In February, TF
training held
organization in
TFF member
building for To
by the Office f
Rights in Euro
Two events w
format. Rama
according to
2019
Image 5

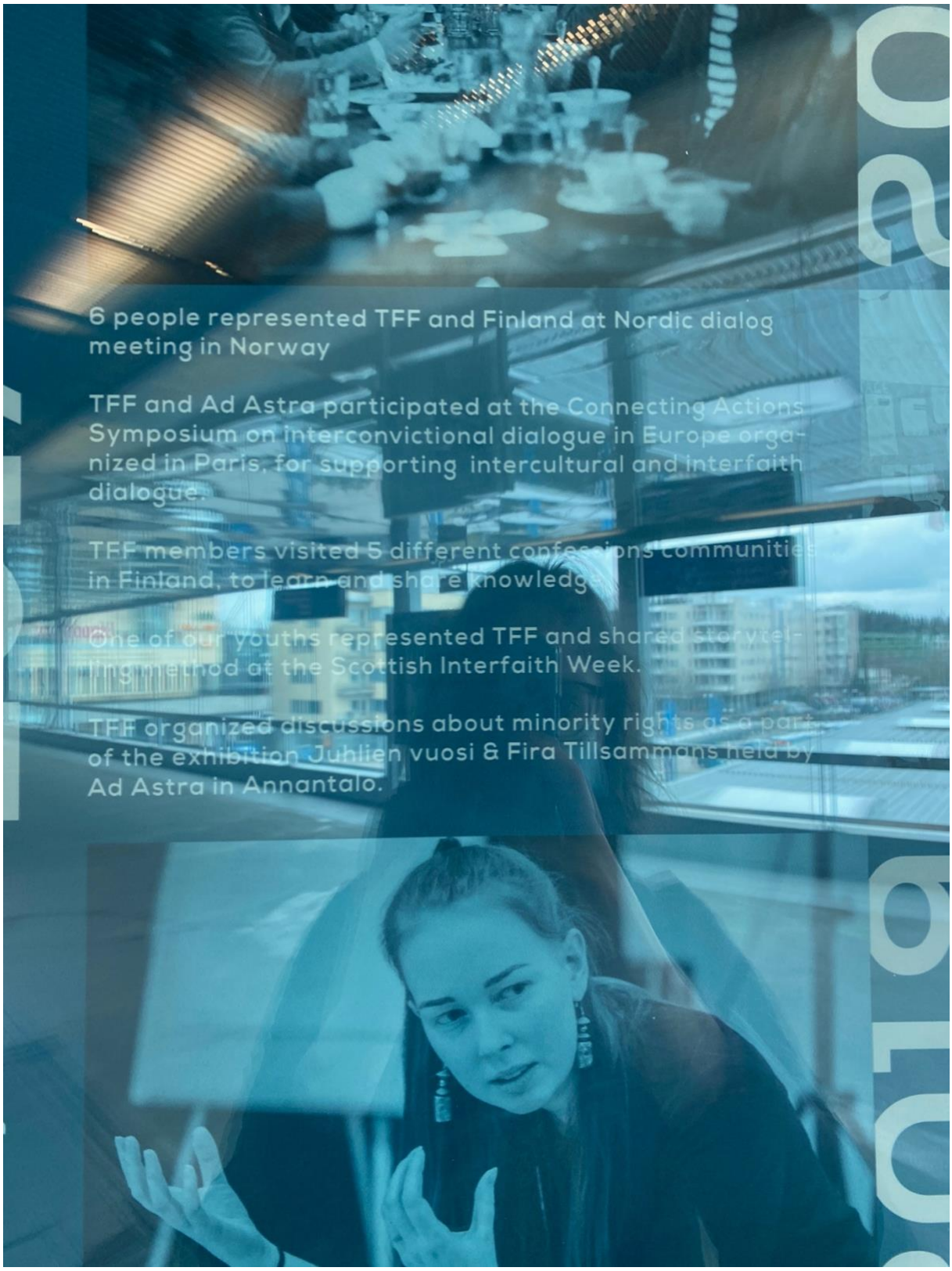
6 people represented TFF and Finland at Nordic dialog meeting in Norway
TFF and Ad Astra participated at the Connecting Actions Symposium on interconvictional dialogue in Europe organized in Paris, for supporting intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
TFF members visited 5 different confessions communities in Finland, to learn and share knowledge.
One of our youths represented TFF and shared storytelling method at the Scottish Interfaith Week.
TFF organized discussions about minority rights as a part of the exhibition Juhlien vuosi & Fira Tillsammans held by Ad Astra in Annantalo.

Image 6

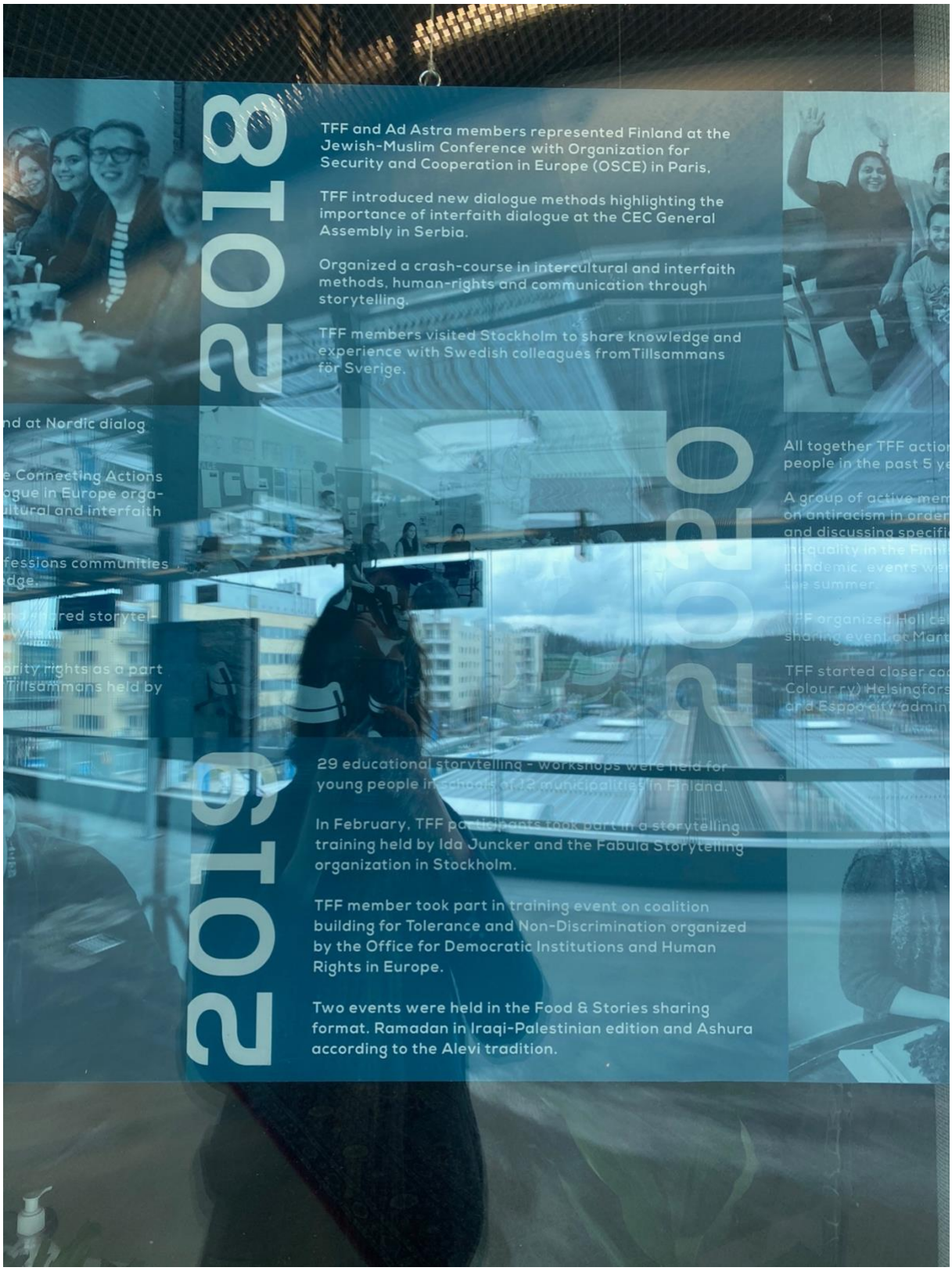
2018
TFF and Ad Astra members represented Finland at the Jewish-Muslim Conference with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Paris.
TFF introduced new dialogue methods highlighting the importance of interfaith dialogue at the CEC General Assembly in Serbia.
Organized a crash-course in intercultural and interfaith methods, human-rights and communication through storytelling.
TFF members visited Stockholm to share knowledge and experience with Swedish colleagues fromTillsammans för Sverige.
2019
29 educational storytelling - workshops were held for young people in
In February, TFF
training held by Ida Juncker and the Fabula Storytelling organization in Stockholm.
TFF member took part in training event on coalition building for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination organized by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Europe.
Two events were held in the Food & Stories sharing format. Ramadan in Iraqi-Palestinian edition and Ashura according to the Alevi tradition.

Image 7

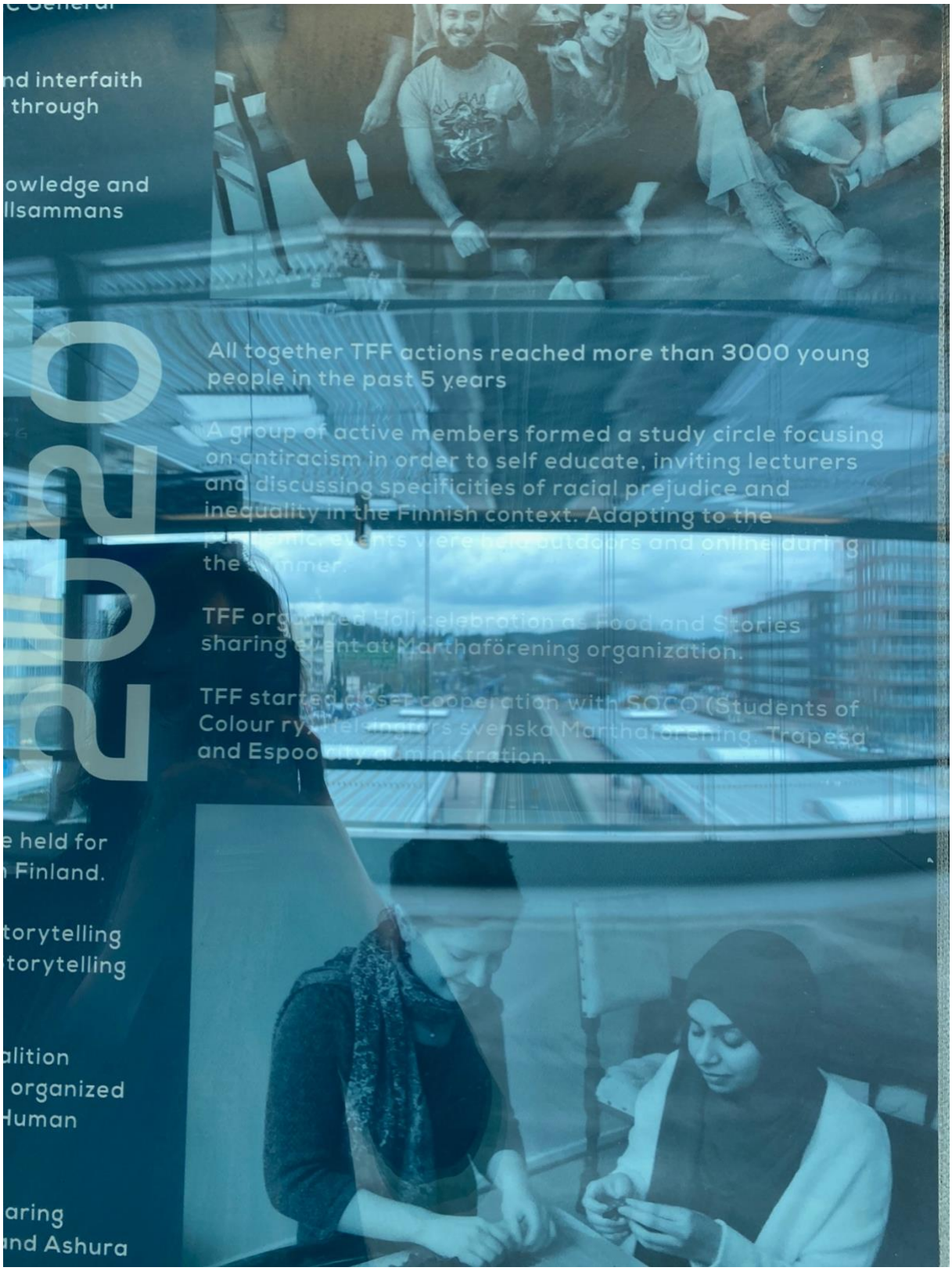
nd interfaith
through
owledge and
llsammans
2020
All together TFF actions reached more than 3000 young people in the past 5 years
A group of active members formed a study circle focusing on antiracism in order to self educate, inviting lecturers and discussing specificities of racial prejudice and inequality in the Finnish context. Adapting to the
the summer.
TFF org
sharing
TFF start
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Image 8

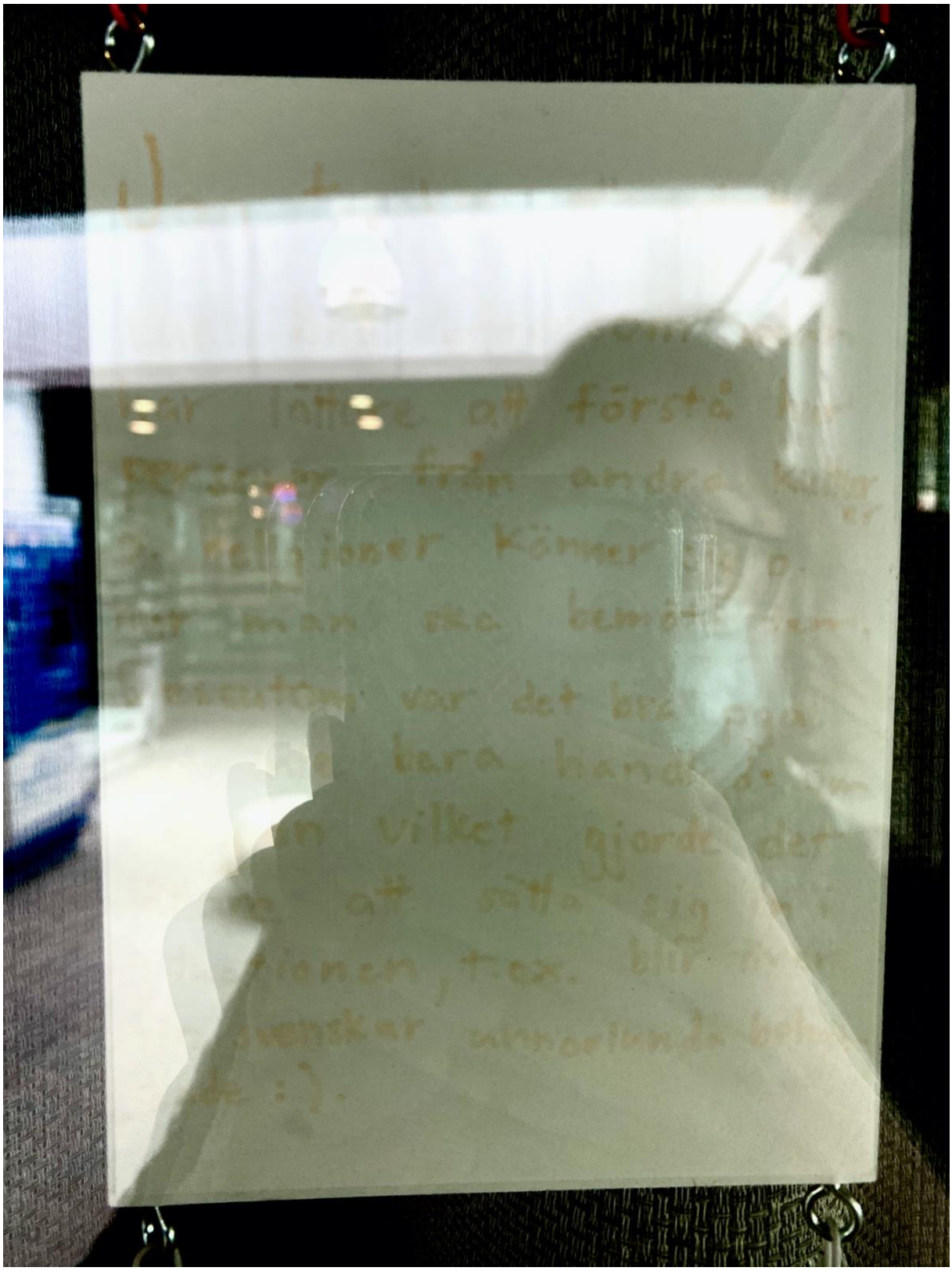
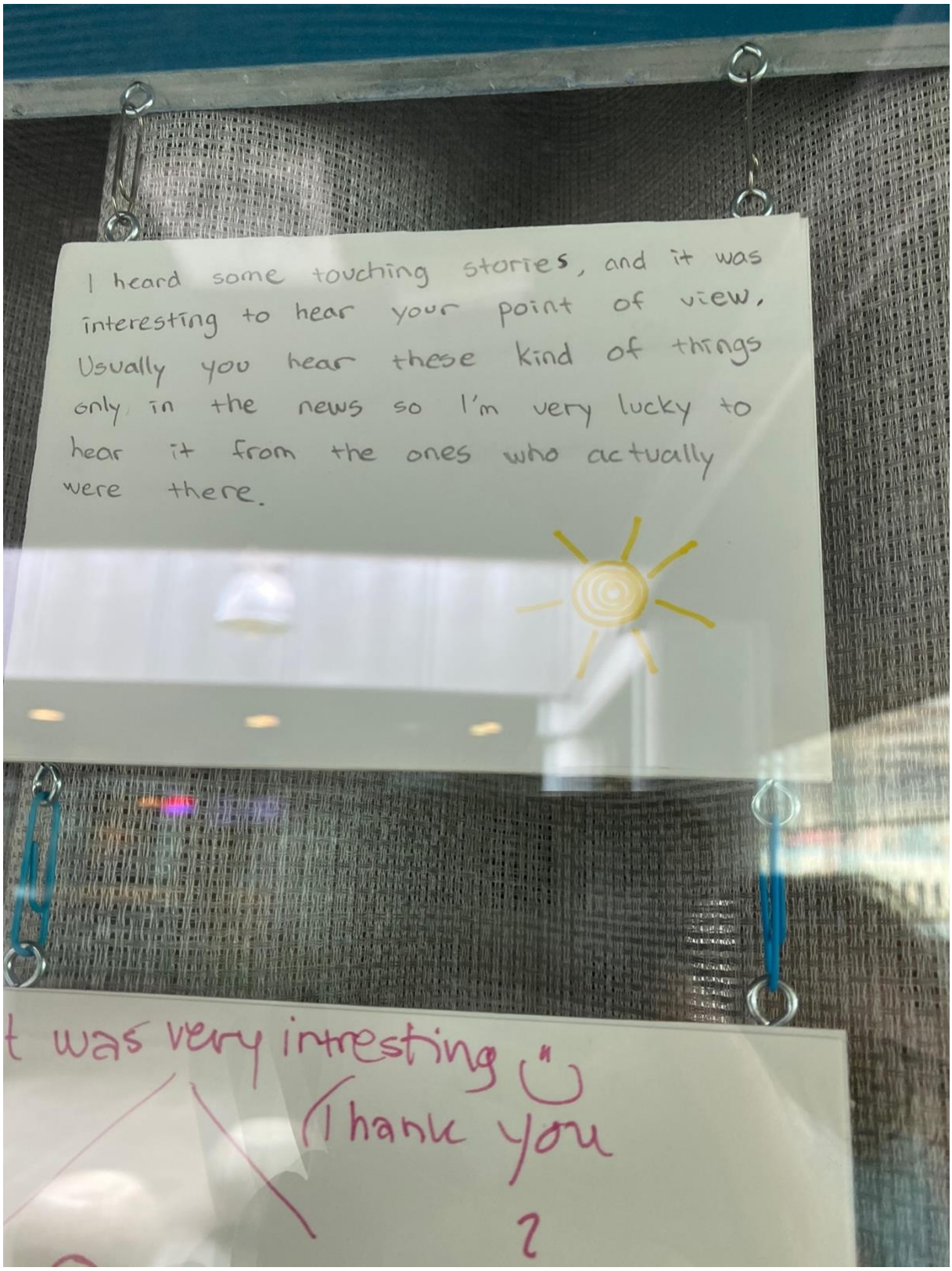


Image 9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t was very intresting
Thank you
?

Image 10